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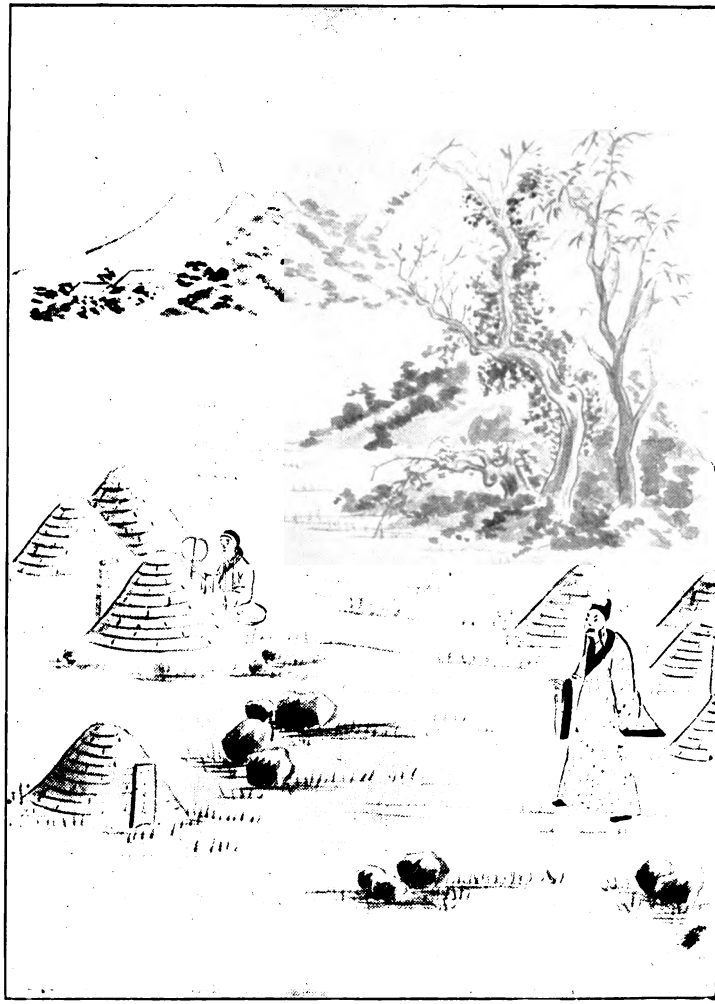

She sat by the side of a grave and fanned it vigorously

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THE INCONSTANCY OF MADAM CHUANG AND OTHER STORIES FROM THE CHINESE

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CHIN KU CH'I KUAN

THE INCONSTANCY OF MADAM CHUANG

AND OTHER STORIES FROM THE CHINESE

TRANSLATED

BY

E. B. HOWELL

WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS BY
A NATIVE ARTIST

LONDON
T. WERNER LAURIE, LTD.
30 NEW BRIDGE STREET, E.C.4.

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

THE book from which the accompanying six stories have been translated is a well-known collection of Chinese tales called " Chin Ku Ch'i Kuan," or " Observations of Strange Matters, New and Old."

These tales appear to have been written towards the end of the Ming Dynasty—about the time of Queen Elizabeth of England—but their authorship is a mystery and no record of first publication exists. That they are by one author, even, is doubtful, for they are by no means of equal merit, either from the point of view of composition or of choice or treatment of subject, and the style differs considerably from story to story.

Many of the famous novels of Old China share the anonymity which attaches to this work, for such books usually deal so outspokenly with the deeds and misdeeds of emperors and officials and with the grievances and hardships of the people, that, had the authors been known, their candour might have brought disastrous results upon themselves and even upon their descendants.

The author or compiler of the " Chin Ku Ch'i Kuan " is alluded to in the laudatory preface, which in my edition is by a later and also anonymous writer, as " The Old Man Embracing the Jar," and there is no other clue to his identity.

Such books as this are unfortunately now rapidly losing favour among the Chinese, and a well-printed copy of any

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of the famous novels of the Ming and Ch'ing Dynasties is increasingly difficult to obtain. They are being replaced by modern stories which bear a strong family resemblance to the lighter present-day fiction of Europe and America, and the situation is but one more exemplification of the inadvisability of exchanging old lamps for new in the East.

The " Chin Ku Ch'i Kuan " comprises forty stories in all. With the help of a Chinese scholar of the old style (without whose aid translation would have been impossible) I have read, wholly or in part, nearly all of them, and I think that those which I have presented here are probably the best, although many others are characterized by a similar power of imagination, freshness of description and quaintness of expression to an extent noteworthy in a book written 350 years ago.

I think that it is a pity that so little notice generally has been given to Chinese fiction. The responsibility for this rests primarily upon the Chinese themselves. Novels are called " Small Talk " in Chinese, and, though they have always been very widely read among the masses, the educated classes have always affected to despise them and to class as literature only the books handed down from generation to generation as sacred, and, to a limited extent, the poems and essays of recognised scholars.

This view of the Chinese novel seems to have communicated itself very readily to European students; and it is mainly the classical literature that has received attention at the hands of translators. This is perhaps natural, but, whatever gain to European literature and philosophical knowledge may have resulted from the translation of the Classics, it seems to me that such stories as those of the " Chin Ku Ch'i Kuan," throwing, as I believe them to do,

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so strong a light upon the psychology of the Chinese people, have a value which cannot be ignored.

One advantage which this book possesses over the majority of works of Chinese fiction is the shortness of the stories which compose it. Most Chinese novels present a continuous narrative of such portentous length that no one but the most pertinacious of Western students could ever hope to read them through in the original. The "Hung Lou Meng," for example, which the Chinese themselves consider to be the best of all their works of fiction, contains about one million characters, and it should be explained that this represents far more than a corresponding number of words in English. The "Chin Ku Ch'i Kuan" is about half this length, and is composed of forty distinct stories, so that the average number of characters in each story is about 12,500, including a more or less lengthy introduction—omitted, for the most part, in the following translations.

In my version I have endeavoured to give a readable narrative rather than a verbatim equivalent, but apart from this consideration I have adhered as closely as I could to the original, only omitting such passages as seemed to me to border on tedium or to be otherwise objectionable.

To enable the reader unacquainted with things Chinese to gain a fuller appreciation of the stories, I have appended to each a few notes. For the information contained in these I am to a great extent indebted to the Chinese scholar aforesaid and to Professor Giles' invaluable "Chinese Biographical Dictionary." The notes are based upon pre-revolution conditions, for things are fluctuating so much nowadays in China that it is difficult to speak with certainty

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upon present-day customs. But I think that old residents in China will agree with me that such changes are largely superficial, and that the Chinese way of thought is still much the same as it has always been.

I make no apology for my effort to give a metrical version of the little poems with which the stories are interlarded. Seldom of any literary merit in the original, they frequently descend to the level of mere doggerel, and are inserted, often merely whimsically, often in the spirit of the chorus of Greek tragedy, to relieve the monotony of the prose, the Chinese say. For poetry is not to the Chinese what it is to the Westerner—a thing apart from the affairs of every day. Every scholar in China is a poet. Poetry is a necessary part of his education; and on the walls of every Chinese house hang metrical inscriptions written on scrolls, which are the commonest form of present to friend or relation. The introduction of commentary in the form of verse is therefore by no means out of place in a story in Chinese prose.

Like most Chinese verses, however, those in this book are not easy to translate except baldly, owing to the highly elliptical form which they often assume, or the obscure allusions which they frequently contain. Some of them I have omitted altogether as beyond my powers or for other reasons.

The illustrations have been drawn for me by a Pekingese youth who has had, I believe, no special training. Though perhaps a trifle crude, they give, I think, an added interest and are very characteristic of the Chinese style of pictorial representation, which bases its effectiveness on the common-sense contention that, to get a good view of anything, one should look at it from above.

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Translations of some of the stories which compose the "Chin Ku Ch'i Kuan" (about fifteen, to my knowledge), in English, French, German or Latin, have already been published, mostly in periodicals, but all are now, I believe, out of print.

Should the student of the Chinese language wish to compare my translation with the original, he should note that my edition is that published in 1905 by the T'ien Shih Chai publishing house of Shanghai.

E. B. HOWELL.

Tientsin, China.

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THE INCONSTANCY OF MADAM CHUANG

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THE INCONSTANCY OF MADAM CHUANG

I

In the latter days of the Chou Dynasty* there lived a famous worthy named Chuang. His *ming* was Chou and his *hao* (Note 1) was Tzu-hsiu. He was born at Meng I in the country of Sung and he held the office of constable under the Chou Dynasty at Ch'i Yüan.

He was a disciple of the founder of the Taoist faith, a great and holy personage whose name was Li, his *ming* being Ehr and his *hao*, Poyang. The hair of this man was white at his birth and he was in consequence always known as Lao Tzu, "The Old Child."

Now Chuang Tzu used frequently to sleep in the daytime, and when he did so he used to dream that he was a butterfly, flitting lightly over garden and copse and meadow. Such dreams were most agreeable to him, and on waking he used to flap his arms up and down as though they were butterfly's wings. He had indeed a most unusual mind, and this dream was very often repeated.

One day he was discussing the Canon of Changes with his master, Lao Tzu (Note 2), and he told him about his dream. Now Lao Tzu was a true Holy One and had knowledge of the three phases of existence, The Past, The Present, and The Future; and he expounded to Chuang Tzu concerning The Past.

He explained that after Chaos was first divided at the creation, Chuang Tzu had existed as a white butterfly at the

* 1122-255 B.C.

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time when Heaven first produced water and the water caused the life of plants and made the flowers blossom forth. The white butterfly, he said, had subsisted on the essence of countless flowers and had received the benefit of the rays of the sun and of the moon. It had thus achieved Release and had become immortal; its wings were as big as the wheels of a cart, and it flitted off to the Jasper Lake. And there it picked and stole the buds of the P'an Peach and in punishment was pecked to death by the wondrous bird that keeps watch over the flowers which bloom below the throne of the Royal Mother of the West (Note 3).

The soul of the butterfly, however, he explained, did not suffer annihilation, but was subsequently reborn into the world in the body of Chuang Tzu. And because the latter thus came of no ordinary origin, and since his heart was steadfast in the Way, Lao Tzu was his teacher and instructed him of the pureness of the Doctrine of Inaction.

And on this day Lao Tzu was expounding the former life, and Chuang Tzu felt as though he had suddenly been awakened out of a dream. He felt the wind again under his arms just as if he were again about to flit off on the wings that he had possessed in his former existence. The successes and the failures, the losses and the gains, of this life he regarded as but the passing of clouds or as the flowing of water, in value not worth a hair. And Lao Tzu knew that Chuang Tzu had a clear understanding; so he expounded to him the secret of immortality as conveyed in the Five Thousand Character Classic of the Canon of Virtue.

This teaching did Chuang Tzu absorb, and in seclusion he purified his soul by meditation and prayer. In due course he became able to metamorphose his frame and to cause simultaneous apparitions of himself to be visible in different places. He then resigned his office as constable which he had held at Ch'i Yuan, and, taking leave of Lao Tzu, became a pilgrim in search of the Way.

But although he had cleansed his heart and had become

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a Taoist devotee, he never eliminated from his practice of life the relationship between husband and wife, and was actually married three times. His first wife died of disease at an early age. His second wife he divorced on account of wrongdoing.

The present story is told of his third wife, a woman of the T'ien family, the clan-name of the State of Ch'i. For Chuang Tzu had in his wanderings visited that country, and the damsel's father, T'ien Tsung, appreciating his sterling worth, had given him his daughter in marriage.

T'ien Shih much exceeded in beauty either of the two former wives of Chuang Tzu, for her complexion was like ice or snow for purity, and her deportment resembled that of a heavenly fairy. Now Chuang Tzu was no mere seeker after pleasure, and his behaviour to his wife was characterized by the utmost respect, but yet he derived as much enjoyment from her society as a fish obtains satisfaction from being restored to the water.

Prince Wei of Ch'u heard of the superiority of Chuang Tzu and sent messengers to him bearing gifts—two thousand taels of pure gold, one thousand rolls of brocade, a decorated chariot drawn by magnificent horses—and asked him to become his Prime Minister.

But Chuang Tzu refused with emphasis.

"The sacrificial ox," he said, "is decked with costly silks and his mouth is continually full of grain and hay. He sees the ox which is harnessed to the plough existing but by labour and bitterness, and he prides himself upon his superior lot. But the day comes when he is led to the great temple preceded by the sacrificial axe. Then he wishes, but in vain, that he could change places with the ox at the plough."

Thus Chuang Tzu refused the prince's presents and returned with his wife to his homeland and dwelt in seclusion among the mountains of Nan Hua near Ts'ao Chou.

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II

One day he was wandering among the foothills and he noted the deserted graves situated all round him. He reflected that there was no distinction between young and old, but that all met there in the end, that the common lot of all alike was the tomb, and that no one could come back again to life.

He pondered thus, sighing deeply, and as he walked farther he came upon a young woman dressed in the white robes of mourning and bending over a newly-made grave, the soil of which was still moist. She sat by the side of the grave and fanned it vigorously with a silken fan, pausing not at all in her efforts.

Chuang Tzu, in surprise, approached her and asked her who she might be, thus engaged among the graves fanning the earth, and what might be the reason of her action.

And the young woman did not rise to reply, but continued her fanning as she answered him. Her voice was as beautiful as the fluty notes of the oriole, or as the early song of the swallows in the spring time. But the words that she uttered were far from being in accordance with the canons of propriety (Note 4). Nevertheless—

> Though shame should crush the utterer of sentiments so vile,
> Her words to many a hearer's face would surely bring a smile!

"This grave is that of my husband," she said. "He, having unhappily died, his body is buried in this place. And while he was alive we loved each other deeply, and when death took him we could not bear to part. Nevertheless he told me with his dying words that if I wished to marry again I was at least to wait until, the funeral having being duly performed, the earth on his grave should be dry.

"Now I am anxious that the earth on his grave, which is,

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as you see, a recent one, shall dry as quickly as possible. It is for that reason that I am fanning it."

"The lady is surely over anxious!" thought Chuang Tzu to himself with a bitter smile. "She says that her husband was very fond of her; what, I wonder, would she have done had this not been the case?"

But he merely said to her: "If you wish, madam, that this new earth shall quickly become dry, the matter presents no difficulty. Your arm is evidently lacking in strength to fan sufficiently vigorously, and I, although without talent, am willing to exert my efforts on your behalf."

Then the woman rose and made a deep obeisance to the sage, thanking him warmly; and with both hands she gave over to him the little white fan. Thereupon Chuang Tzu, muttering some Taoist incantation, made several passes up and down the grave with the fan, and the moisture in the soil forthwith disappeared altogether and the earth became dry.

At this, the woman laughed aloud from her exceedingly great pleasure.

"I am indeed under a deep obligation to you, sir," she said, "for your help." And with her slender fingers she detached a silver pin from her hair and offered it to the sage as a present, together with the fan itself. Chuang Tzu refused the silver pin but accepted the fan, and the overjoyed woman departed.

The sage was greatly perturbed by the incident, however, and returned to his house, where he sat alone under his thatched eaves and gazed, musing, at the little silken fan as it lay before him. Anon he sighed and murmured the following verse:

"Only who in past existence met as bitter foes (Note 5)
In this life can meet together; thus strife ever grows!
Had he known her love to be as feeble as his life,
How could he have taken to him such a fickle wife?"

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Now T'ien Shih, Madam Chuang, happened to be standing just behind him at this moment and heard these despondent words. So, coming in front of her husband as he sat, she asked him what might be their meaning. Chuang Tzu was a true sage and had attained the Way, and he and his wife were always wont to address one another in terms of respect.

"Wherefore are you so sad, sir," she asked; "and where did you obtain this fan?"

Then her husband related to her the details of his encounter with the woman. "So you see, madam," he ended, "this fan is a thing to dry earth with. And she gave it to me because I had put forth my strength on her behalf!"

On hearing the story, T'ien Shih reddened with anger, and, addressing heaven, she exclaimed how unspeakably shameless was the conduct of the woman in question, and remarked that no other creature so vile as she could possibly be found.

But Chuang Tzu answered her in verse, as follows:

"A man and wife together live; how well does she behave!
But when he dies how often grows a wish to fan the grave!
A tiger's picture shows his skin, but not the inward part;
And men are known from face alone. Who knows the secret heart?"

At these words T'ien Shih became exceedingly enraged. The old saying has it that "hatred takes no heed of relationship and rage obliterates propriety!" And in her anger she lost sight of decorum and spat into the face of the sage, her husband.

"Although in a sense it is true that all are alike," she said vehemently, "yet at the same time there are the wise and the foolish, the good and the bad! How can you venture thus lightly to class together all the women under heaven? It is not fitting to confuse good people and bad

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people in this manner! Do you not fear to cause offence in speaking thus?"

"Your words, madam," returned her husband, "are both boastful and without consideration. Supposing that I should be so unfortunate as to die. You, a mere girl, as pretty as a flower, as elegant as jade, would not wait five years, no, nor yet three, before you married a second husband!"

"A good official does not serve under two dynasties," replied his wife, "nor does a virtuous woman marry two husbands! Where have you seen any decent woman who drank the tea and slept in the bed, first of one family and then of another? If, unhappily, so great a misfortune as to lose my husband were to befall me, so shameless a deed as that which you have indicated could not possibly be perpetrated by your widow, not only in three or five years, but in all my life! For even when I dream at night I retain some decency of feeling."

"One can never tell!" said Chuang Tzu slowly.

T'ien Shih then in her indignation swore a great oath.

"A woman is more virtuous than a man!" she cried. "Reflect upon your own conduct! That indeed was without either love or propriety. One wife dies and you get another; she is divorced and you take a third! And with you men, all are alike! We women say 'One saddle, one horse'; and I am one upon whom the greatest reliance can be placed. How could I then be willing to give others cause to talk about me in such a way that posterity would laugh me to scorn? You are killing me with wrongs!" And, so saying, she snatched the silken fan from her husband's grasp and tore it into fragments.

"There is no need for this display of anger," he said quietly. "I am indeed overjoyed to hear that you have formed so meritorious a resolution." And he spoke no more of the matter.

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III

A few days later, however, Chuang Tzu suddenly sickened and took to his couch. Each day his condition became more serious and T'ien Shih wept continually at the head of his bed.

"I am sick unto death," said the sage, "and we must soon part for evermore. What a pity it is that you tore to pieces that fan! Had it been retained I might have presented it to you so that you might fan my grave with it!"

"Oh, master," sobbed his wife; "do not, I pray you, doubt me. I am myself a scholar and well acquainted with the principles of correct behaviour. I shall be faithful to you until the end of my life! I swear to you that I have no other intention, and if you still do not trust me I am willing even to kill myself now, before your eyes, and thus give proof of my sincerity!"

"It is enough!" murmured the dying man. "Now that I hear the words in which you express your virtuous determination, I, Chuang Tzu, shall be able to close my eyes when I die!" (Note 6).

And so saying, he breathed his last for his end had come.

Bitter indeed were his wife's lamentations as she stroked his dead body! Then going right and left among the neighbours she obtained burial clothes and a coffin, and clothing herself in full mourning she wept all day and all night for a long while, behaving, when she thought upon Chuang Tzu's love and kindness for her, like one mad or drunken, and going without food and sleep.

All those who dwelt near by among the mountains had recognized Chuang Tzu as a modest and retiring sage, but those who came to pay their duty to him as he lay there, were fewer than they who went to market upon market days.

IV

Now it fell out that on the seventh day after Chuang Tzu's death there arrived unexpectedly at the house a young

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scholar. His face was beautifully pale with study as though it had been powdered, and his lips were as red as vermilion. He was in fact unsurpassed in personal beauty and no one could have excelled him in grace. He was dressed in purple garments and wore a black official hat, a jewelled belt, and red shoes; and with him came an aged retainer.

He said that he was the grandson of the Prince of Ch'u and that in the previous year he had made arrangements with Chuang Tzu to be his pupil; and he added that he had come to pay his respects to his master.

And when he heard that Chuang Tzu had died a few days before his grief was extreme. He quickly removed his coloured garments and clad himself in robes of mourning which his servant brought for him out of his baggage. Then, suitably clad, he approached the coffin and ko-towed four times before it.

"Oh, my master," he cried, "your pupil is indeed unfortunate that he cannot profit by your instructions imparted verbally. I will wear for you mourning for one hundred days and thus display my feelings of dutiful respect." And so saying, he ko-towed again four times and then rose to his feet, his tears flowing freely.

He then requested to be allowed to see T'ien Shih, who at first refused to receive him. The Prince, however, sent a message to her.

"According to the custom of ancient times," he said, "it was not necessary among families who were closely allied by friendly ties for the female members to live in seclusion. And in this case your humble servant has already established with the Master Chuang the relation between pupil and instructor."

So T'ien Shih came out a few steps from the mourning chamber and received the Prince, exchanging greetings with him. And when she saw what a talented and elegant person he was, she was moved with admiration, experiencing a

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strong inclination towards him, and she much regretted that there was so little excuse for her to see him again.

"Although my master is no more," said the Prince to her, "I, his pupil, cannot forget my feelings of friendly respect towards him, and I greatly desire to beg the hospitality of his roof for one hundred days, firstly to observe fitly the stipulated period of mourning, and secondly that I may see what writings he has left behind him on record, so that I may even yet benefit by his instructions."

"As our respective families are mutually intimate already by reason of the relation between pupil and teacher," said T'ien Shih, "I see no reason why you should not remain." And she forthwith invited him to share her evening repast, which was then ready.

When the meal was ended, she produced the writings of her husband called "The True Canon of Nan Hua" and "The Five Thousand Virtuous Sayings of Lao Tzu," compiled by Chuang Tzu during his lifetime, and gave them to the Prince, who expressed his gratitude.

Now the room in which the coffin was placed was next door to that set apart for the Prince as his bed-chamber, and T'ien Shih every day used her visits of lamentation over the coffin as an excuse to exchange greetings with the visitor. She soon fell deeply in love with him and they began to exchange amorous glances. But though he was only half in love with her, she was wholly in love with him, and she felt that it was fortunate that they were among the mountains and in so remote a spot, for if it should happen that she were to stray somewhat from the beaten track of propriety and virtue, there were but few who might gossip. She regretted very much that the period of mourning was not yet over, and she sighed as she reflected that when it is the woman who courts, it is difficult for her to take the initiative. So she determined to possess her soul in patience.

Thus about half a month passed and she became as amorous as an ape and as restive as a horse, so that she

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found no repose at all. She therefore called the old servant into her room secretly one evening and plied him long with the best wine and flattered him. At length she asked him if his master had as yet found a wife. The old man replied that his master was not yet married or even affianced, whereupon she asked him again what sort of a woman his master intended to choose as his mate.

"My master has already spoken to me about this matter," replied the old man, who by this time was half-intoxicated, "and has said that if he could only find some lady as beautiful as you yourself, madam, he would be perfectly contented!"

"Can this indeed be true?" exclaimed T'ien Shih. "I fear that you may be lying to me!"

"I am already full of years," replied the old man; "how could I speak that which is not true?"

"May I then request that you will be the go-between in this matter?" (Note 7) asked T'ien Shih, "and will arrange the match, if indeed it is true that your master is not unwilling to regard with favour one so unworthy as myself? For I would most gladly become his wife and his servant."

'My master has already mentioned it to me," replied the man, "and has remarked what a capital match it would make. But he said that such a thing could not be considered, for it would be an offence against propriety for a pupil to marry his instructor's widow. He fears lest scandal would result!"

"But the arrangement which existed between your master and my late husband came to nothing," replied T'ien Shih. "No actual instruction from the north (Note 8) was ever transmitted. They cannot be considered therefore as having really been teacher and pupil at all. Moreover, we live here in a very remote spot among the mountains and the few neighbours that there are are very ignorant people and no scandal would be caused. Can you, sir, not devise some way

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out of the difficulty? If you could, I should be most glad to invite you to the wedding feast!"

The old man said that he would do his best in the matter and turned to go; and, as he was leaving, T'ien Shih called him back and besought him that, if his master were to consent, he should come straight into her room at once and tell her, no matter what hour it might be, for, she added, she would be waiting up for him.

And after the man had departed she became exceedingly restless and anxious from expectation, and kept on peeping round the room where the coffin lay. She only wished that she had a rope tied to the ankle of that handsome young man so that she could pull him in and throw her arms around him.

It was then getting dusk and she felt that she could not bear the suspense, so as soon as it was quite dark she crept into the mourning chamber and listened to see if she could hear what was passing in the adjoining room.

All at once she heard a sound coming apparently from near the coffin, and she started with fright for she thought first that it might be her husband coming back to life again. So she went quickly back to her room and returned with a lighted lamp to find that it was only the old servant, who was lying fast asleep on the altar in front of the coffin, where he had lain down after his potations. She did not dare to upbraid him or even to rouse him from his torpor, so she went back to her own room and lay there awake listening to the night-watchman going his rounds and beating out the watches on his bamboo clapper.

Thus the night wore away, and when daylight came she saw the old man walking up and down in the courtyard, but he did not come to report to her the result of his interview with his master. T'ien Shih could not bear to wait until he should come to her of his own accord, so she called him at once into her room and questioned him. He only shook his head, however, saying: "No use, no use!"

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"What do you mean?" she asked in dismay. "You could not have conveyed my meaning properly to him!"

"Oh, yes, I did indeed," was the reply. "But the objections which my master raised were unanswerable. He said that there was no need to talk about your beauty, madam, which was sufficiently obvious, nor the fact that no relations as between master and pupil had been actually established. He brought forward other objections under three headings which prevented my coming back with a favourable reply."

"And what were these three objections?" asked T'ien Shih.

"I will tell you, madam," he answered. "My master said that in the first place there was that ill-omened object still in the room there. He felt that he could not consent to a marriage ceremony being celebrated under such circumstances, and that moreover such a course would be an outrage on the canons of propriety.

"In the next place," the old man went on, "my master pointed out that Chuang Tzu and yourself, madam, were a very devoted couple and that your late husband was a celebrated worthy of well-known virtue. He feels that his own attainments cannot possibly compare with those of such a man, and he thinks that you would not be able to feel sufficient respect for him in consequence.

"In the third place, my master has brought hardly anything with him, for nearly all his clothes and other possessions have been left behind. To enter into a marriage with empty hands, bringing no wedding gift and no money for the wedding feast, was a thing, he said, not to be thought of. And therefore he is of opinion that the matter cannot be arranged for these three reasons."

"Not one of these three reasons is valid at all!" the widow returned. "That coffin has not taken root, as far as I know; there is an old out-house behind there which is now empty, and it will be easy enough to summon a few of

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the villagers to carry it out there. Thus is his first objection disposed of!

"As regards his second objection, I would tell you that the story about Chuang Tzu being of such celebrated and well-known virtue is a gross exaggeration. His domestic affairs were always most ill-regulated and everyone complained of his lack of virtue in the matter of the divorce of his second wife. It is true that Wei the Prince of Ch'u entertained a very high opinion of him and asked him to become his Minister, but Chuang Tzu knew very well that he was most ill-fitted for so high a position, so he fled away into this place. And only last month he went down into the valley by himself and there met a widow who was fanning her husband's grave so that she might marry again as soon as the earth was dry. My wretched husband sported with her, and, taking her silken fan, he fanned the earth dry for her!

"And he actually brought the fan back here; but I took it from him and destroyed it. A few days before he died, in fact, we had a serious quarrel about the matter! I would like to know if such an incident as that is a proof of our mutual devotion!

"Now your master," T'ien Shih continued, "is a young man still, and is of great learning. He will most assuredly rise to a high official position. Furthermore, he has the rank of a prince. I, his handmaid, however, am likewise of a royal house, for my father was T'ien Tsung. We are equals in status and this match is clearly preordained by Heaven!

"His third objection is raised on the score of his having brought no money either for the marriage banquet or for a wedding gift. But this is a matter for the woman to decide. Who would wish to receive a gift under such circumstances? The omission of the customary marriage banquet is likewise a small matter.

"But, on the other hand, I, his handmaid, have saved

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some twenty taels of silver from my household expenditure. This money I freely give to your master so that he may provide himself with a new suit of silken robes. Please go and answer him in such terms as I have indicated. If he should agree, to-day is an auspicious day and we can immediately become united!"

So the old man took the twenty taels and returned to his master, who expressed his readiness to accede to T'ien Shih's proposition.

And T'ien Shih's joy thereat was as wide as the earth and as high as the heavens; she doffed her mourning robes and put on a new and brightly coloured dress; she powdered her face and painted her lips with vermilion. Then, having sent out the old servant to hire a few of the rustics from the neighbouring hamlet to remove the coffin of her late husband and put it down in the shed outside, she swept out the mourning chamber and laid out the table which had lately been used as an altar to serve as a table for the wedding feast. The following verse bears testimony to the situation:

The lovely widow added charm gains from her mourning weeds,
But that the prince a trifler is, alas! seems all too plain.
She that declared that no good steed more than one saddle needs
To-day intends to break her vow and basely wed again!

V

And that evening, T'ien Shih lighted incense-sticks in the centre chamber where the coffin had been, and lit up the room with brilliant lamps. And the prince appeared with a new tassel upon his hat and clad in new flowing robes, to meet his bride in her red jacket and her brocade skirt. And there they stood together in the light of the gilded

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candles, unspeakably fine in their jewels and beautiful garments.

They had already made their obeisance to each other and lovingly, hand-in-hand, had entered the wedding chamber to drink the cup of wine which was to make them one, when suddenly the Prince knit his brows as if with a spasm of pain, and stood as though rooted to the spot. A moment afterwards he fell forward to the ground, his two hands clutching at his throat, and gasped out that a frightful pain had suddenly attacked him! T'ien Shih, being desperately in love with him, felt none of the customary bashfulness of a bride but hugged him to her bosom and tried to soothe him, asking him what ailed him. But the Prince was in such agony that he could not speak, and gasped as though at the point of death.

The old servitor, having heard his master fall, rushed in to lend his aid, and T'ien Shih asked him whether the Prince had ever had a similar attack.

"Yes, indeed," was the reply; "my master has suffered in this way many times in the past. Once every year or so he has had such attacks and no ordinary drug can cure him. There is but one remedy that can do him any good!"

"And what is that?" T'ien Shih asked eagerly.

"The court physician wrote out for him a very singular prescription," was the reply, "ordering for him no less than the brain of a living man, to be swallowed in hot wine! This strange medicine effects an immediate cure, and formerly when these attacks came upon him his father requisitioned and obtained the person of a condemned criminal, whose brain was removed upon his execution. But now, in this remote spot among the mountains, what can be done for him? He is, I fear me, lost indeed!"

"A living man's brain is truly unobtainable," answered T'ien Shih; "but could not the brain of a man who has been dead for some time also be used?"

"The physician did say," replied the old man, "that the

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brain of a dead man could also be used, provided that he had been dead not more than one hundred days!"

"Ah!" gasped T'ien Shih. "Would my husband, then, not serve? He has been dead only a matter of twenty days! Why not break open the coffin and obtain his brain?"

"But you, madam, can hardly be expected to agree to such a proposition as that!" the old man said quickly.

"I regard myself already as the wife of the Prince," replied T'ien Shih. "I would give my own life to serve him if necessary with the utmost readiness. Why, then, should I hesitate about a few old bones which in any case would soon become a mass of corruption!"

So, telling the old man to support his master's head, she ran off to fetch the chopper which was used for the firewood, and with this implement firmly grasped in her right hand, and with a lamp in her left, she made her way rapidly to the shed where her husband's coffin had been placed. Then, placing the lamp on a bench and tucking up her sleeves, she grasped the chopper firmly in both hands, and, taking a sure aim, she delivered a mighty blow with all her strength!

A woman's force is but slight, and, as you would have supposed, hardly sufficient to cleave open a coffin. But Chuang Tzu was an exceedingly sensible man, and had left special instructions that his coffin was to be of common soft wood, not more than three inches thick (Note 9), and the first chop brought away a great piece of wood. Several more blows followed and the coffin lid was soon split open. Then T'ien Shih paused in her efforts, out of breath with the unwonted exertion.

But to her consternation she heard her late husband within the coffin give a loud gasp of disgust. Then, pushing aside the lid, he raised his body and sat up!

T'ien Shih, although by nature the most relentless of persons, was after all a woman, and, being desperately

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afraid, all strength went from her knees, which knocked together in the extremity of her terror, while her head swam, her heart leaped in confusion, and the chopper slipped from her grasp to the ground.

"Help me out of this coffin!" exclaimed her husband sternly, and though she could scarcely summon up enough strength to do so, she assisted her husband to reach the ground in safety.

Chuang Tzu then raised the lamp and went with it into the house, followed by his wife. The latter knew that the Prince and the old man were waiting there, and rivers of cold sweat coursed down her frame, so great was her apprehension. She knew not which way to turn or what to do. But when she reached the house, she found to her amazement that the two men had disappeared!

And although her fear was still upon her she began to regain her courage to some extent and to think as to how she could explain the situation. So she said to Chuang Tzu timidly: "I, your servant, after your death mourned over you day and night without ceasing. Just now, however, I heard a slight sound coming from your coffin, and I remembered that among the men of old time there were stories of how the spirit of one that had died sometimes came back to him. I hoped that possibly you also were returning to the world, so I ran to fetch the chopper and hacked the coffin open. Thanks be to heaven and to earth that you have indeed recovered and come to life again. What wonderfully good fortune for me, your servant!"

"I thank you, wife, for your kind words," replied Chuang Tzu. "But there is one thing which I would ask you to explain, and that is the fact that you do not appear to have worn mouring for me very long! How is it that you are clad in all this gay attire—gold embroidered coat, forsooth, and decorated skirt?"

"I could never have allowed my ugly clothes to spoil the joy of opening the coffin," replied the cunning woman. "As

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"Help me out of this coffin!"

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I was about to secure the unspeakable happiness of seeing you again I put on gay attire as an auspicious omen!"

"Indeed!" said Chuang Tzu. "But there is yet another question that I should like to ask. Why is it that my coffin was not placed in the proper mourning chamber, but, instead, was put away in that outhouse? That could hardly have have been also an auspicious omen!"

To this his wife could think of no suitable reply, and when Chuang Tzu's gaze met the table spread for the wedding feast he made no comment. But he ordered wine to be brought and when it came he filled and drained a great goblet many times.

T'ien Shih, not being a very clever person, thought that she had succeeded in deceiving her husband and began to hope that they might perhaps live again a happy life together as before. So she put her two arms on the table by the wine bottle to be ready to ply her husband with wine, and began to cajole him with fair words and affectionate gestures. But Chuang Tzu, who was beginning to shows signs of intoxication, seized a pen and wrote these four lines of verse:

"Upon my death I sundered all the ties that bound us twain,
Now it is I who bear no love, while you would love again;
Should we renew our former life of fond connubial bliss,
Above my head once more I'd dread to hear the chopper hiss!"

And, seeing these four lines, T'ien Shih was entirely abashed with shame and hung her head, not daring to utter a single word.

But Chuang Tzu went on writing:

"Long have we lived together now with no affection true;
The old man was no sooner cold than you would wed anew,
The coffin lid was hacked to bits by your relentless hand,
You did not even wait until the grave-mound dry was fanned!"

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And then at last he spoke.

"I now order you," he said, "to look upon the forms of two friends of yours!" and raising his hand he pointed out through the open door.

His wife turned her head and looked, and there she saw the forms of the Prince and his old servant as if about to enter! She leaped into the air with terror, and then turning round again she saw that her husband had disappeared! But when she looked again towards the door, the other two were no longer to be seen. Where indeed were they?

As will have been guessed, however, ere now, these happenings were all due to the miraculous power that Chuang Tzu possessed which enabled him to transform himself and to project his body.

T'ien Shih was almost terrified to death and felt that she had indeed been irremediably shamed, so taking off her embroidered silk girdle she tied the end to one of the beams above her head and thus hanged herself and died.

Alas! Alas! How sad!

But this time death was genuine enough and there was no pretence. And when Chuang Tzu saw that the breath of life had departed from her, he cut down her body and laid it in the coffin with the splitten lid. Then he took one of the earthen rice-bowls from the table and, tapping upon it with his finger and making it ring again in rhythmical measure, he leaned against the coffin and sang the following song, accompanying himself upon the bowl:

She and I were born alike,
Who knows how, who knows why?
She was no true wife to me,
No fit husband I!
Rashly we two were wed,
Under one roof lived we;
The silver cord of my life was snapped,
Another suitor came speedily.

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The evil man thinks not on life or on death,
Death and life are alike to him,
But I saw down to her inmost soul,
Death was her due for her cruelty grim.

While she lives her passion rules her,
Now in death the north wind cools her.

She wishes to use my brain,
A chopper keen she brings;
Now I use her as a theme for my song,
For she's gone to the cold Nine Springs.
The chopper's crash I heard,
I returned to life so dear,
And when her spirit hears my song
Its meaning will be clear.

I break this wretched bowl and sigh;
What is she? Who am I?

And, having sung this song, Chuang Tzu composed these four lines of verse:

I bury you when you are dead,
But when I die, you haste to wed.
And if I really had been dead,
I wonder what folks would have said!

Then, his versification finished, Chuang Tzu laughed loudly and long and shattered the rice-bowl on the ground. And, setting fire to his house and its contents, he burned it utterly to the ground, reducing everything, including the coffin, to ashes.

Only the two Canons, "The Virtue of the Way" and "The True Canon of Nan Hua," were not consumed, but were picked up afterwards from the ruined house among the mountains, and thus were preserved unto this day.

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VI

As for Chuang Tzu, he wandered far and wide and never took another wife. He is said to have met Lao Tzu again at Han Ku Kuan and to have accompanied him from there and thus to have gained The Way and become a disembodied spirit.

"Wu Chi did kill his wife without a cause at all, they say;
And Hsün Ling nearly died of grief when his wife passed away.
But let us think of Chuang Tzu's song about his erring wife,
And I, for one, will take him as a pattern for my life!"

NOTES

Note 1.—*His MING was Chou and his HAO was Tzu-hsiu: Chinese names.* The names of Chinese are often a puzzle to the uninitiated, and are reminiscent of the difficulty that Alice encountered in the Looking-glass Country with regard to the name of the poem sung to her by the White Knight.

The names of Chinese consist generally of three, sometimes of two, words. The surname, which as with us is the father's family name, is always put first. The other word or words usually quoted form the official personal name, or Ming. For the first few years of a child's life, however, he bears a baby, or "milk" name. This is generally chosen with reference to the time of his birth or to some personal peculiarity. Thus I once knew a Chinese boy whose milk name was Liu Chin, which means "six catties" (=eight pounds), that having been his weight when he was born.

This milk name is retained until the boy goes to school, and then his personal name (Ming) is chosen for him. This is the name which he afterwards has printed on his visiting cards, and is used in all official documents, etc. It is chosen with great care and brothers often have in common the first of the two words (if there be two) which compose it.

But the name by which a man is always known to his friends and

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acquaintances is his Hao. This he choses himself, and it may or may not have reference to his Ming.

Thus a former Chinese minister to Great Britain who received the honour of knighthood was known as Sir Chih-ch'en Lo Feng-lu. Of this medley, Lo was his surname, Feng-lu his Ming and Chih-ch'en his Hao.

A married woman is always alluded to in writing (doubtless to prevent ambiguity, for a man may have several wives) not by her husband's name, but by her father's, followed by the word *Shih*, meaning clan or family. Thus a Miss Mei marries a Mr Ni and is known as Mei Shih. This method of nomenclature has been preserved in the following stories.

Besides the above there are other names which are given in China—literary names, nick-names, posthumous names, etc., as will be seen in the following stories—but the above explanation will be sufficient for the purpose of this book.

It should be noted that in China all personal names mean something and are bestowed with a full knowledge of that meaning, and not as with us.

Note 2.—Chuang Tzu lived in the fourth and third centuries B.C., while Lao Tzu was born in the sixth century B.C., so if the two conversed it must have been after the latter became a disembodied immortal.

Note 3.—*The Royal Mother of the West.* A legendary goddess, in whose garden grew the peaches of immortality. She is identified by Professor Giles with Hera of Greek mythology.

Note 4.—*The re-marriage of widows.* A widow should never marry again, particularly if she has a son by her deceased husband. By her first marriage she became a member of her husband's family, and a virtuous widow will always remain true to her husband's memory, bringing up her son to be his father's filial successor. By marrying again, she transfers herself to a different family and her unfortunate son is thereby left in danger of becoming a person without any ancestors. A second marriage for a widow is therefore a gross act of treachery. It frequently happens in China, however, but only among the poorer or the uneducated classes.

Note 5.—It appears to be a curious tenet of Taoism that if two people are mutually antagonistic, it is a sign that they were also foes in a previous incarnation.

Note 6.—According to the Chinese belief, a man is unable to close his eyes when he dies if his mind is disturbed by any troublesome affair which he leaves unsettled.

Note 7.—In China, marriages are always arranged by a third party, and there is nothing derogatory in the proposal being initiated by the woman's family. For further light upon Chinese marriage customs, see Story No. VI.

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Note 8.—"Instruction from the north": Chinese etiquette is most strict as to the order of precedence at table. The chief guest always sits facing south, and the same position is always the right of a teacher.

Note 9.—A good coffin is a highly prized possession, and most wealthy men make provision during their life-time for their future needs in this respect. It is, for example, a most filial act for a son to present a coffin to his father as a birthday present. A high-class coffin made of *Nan* wood and properly lacquered is seven inches thick and may cost over a thousand taels of silver (£150).

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THE MINISTER, THE LUTE, AND THE WOOD-CUTTER

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THE MINISTER, THE LUTE, AND THE WOOD-CUTTER

To-day no equal can be found for Pao Shu's generous ways,
The melodies of Po Ya's lute what man could now appraise?
A fiend would be far kindlier than the false friends of to-day,
And alone throughout the world I wend my solitary way!

WHEN we review the friendships that have existed from the most early times, that which united Kuan and Pao stands forth pre-eminent. Kuan was the famous Kuan I-wu; Pao was the equally illustrious Pao Shu-ya. These two were partners in business, and when they divided their profits Kuan I-wu always took the larger share, since Pao Shu-ya recognised that no spirit of avarice animated his friend, whose poverty he well knew. And subsequently when Kuan I-wu was cast into prison, Pao Shu-ya redeemed him and obtained for him the post of Minister in the Ch'i State. Such friends as these are friends indeed!

But friendships may be founded in different ways. There is the friendship that is born of kindnesses reciprocated; there is the friendship that is born of mutual sympathy; and there is the friendship that is born of a common taste in musical sounds. But, alas, to-day no such distinctions exist!

Listen now to the following old legend concerning Yü Po-ya! Lend me your ears, my masters, if you will, and hear! And if you will not, get you gone upon your honourable ways!

A friend now speaks to friends who list to hear,
But if no friends I have—I will forbear!

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I

In the early days of the Chou Dynasty, when there was war in all the land, there lived a famous man named Yü whose *ming* was Jui, his *hao* being Po-ya. He was a native of Ch'eng Tu in the Ch'u State, which town is now called Ching Chou Fu and is within the present province of Hupei. And though this Yü Po-ya was a native of the Ch'u State, his official destiny led him to the State of Chin, where he rose to be a minister of importance. And he was deputed by the ruler of Chin upon a diplomatic mission to the Ch'u State, involving the bearing of presents. This trust Po-ya readily undertook, firstly because he knew that his own talents were great and that he could perform it with distinction, and secondly because it gave him an opportunity to revisit his home. His mission was thus doubly acceptable to him.

And he proceeded to Ch'eng Tu by the land route and had audience with the king of Ch'u, carrying out the orders of the Chin ruler, his master. The king of Ch'u entertained him and treated him well, giving him many presents in return.

Now Ch'eng Tu was his family home and he could not forbear to go to visit the tomb of his fathers and to see again his friends and relations; yet he was most mindful of his master's business, which he neither neglected nor delayed. This completed, he took leave of the king of Ch'u, who presented him with gold and coloured satin and a lofty chariot drawn by four steeds.

But he had been absent for many years from the Ch'u State, and when he saw the country again he was struck anew by the splendour of its scenery by mountain and river. He became in consequence most anxious to see as much of it as possible and determined to return by water. So he falsely petitioned the king of Ch'u to the following effect:

"Being the dog and the horse of the state, this Minister

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is unhappily afflicted with a sickness brought on by overwork. He can hardly support the rigours of a return journey overland in a chariot and he therefore craves the favour of a boat that he may tend his sickness with medicines by the way."

This petition the king of Ch'u immediately granted and ordered his minister of the navy to set apart two great junks, the more important to convey the envoy from Chin, and the other for his baggage and retainers. And the oars and rudder of both were carved and decorated, and the lofty sails and the awnings of both were of embroidered silk. All was of the best and most luxurious. And the officials of the state accompanied him down to the river's brink, where he bade them farewell.

To view the scenery and learn its varied lore,
Short seems the long way by the river's winding shore.

Now Po-ya was a son of talent, who was independent of spirit and fond of travel, and the mountain and river scenery appealed to him exceedingly; so, as his boat sped along before the wind, cleaving the myriad ridges of the waves, he never grew tired of gazing at the hills, range upon range, with the water ever gleaming on into the distance, and after many days he arrived near the mouth of the Han river. It was then the night of the fifteenth day of the eighth moon, the festival of mid-autumn, and it so happened that a sudden storm of wind had raised great billows and the rain poured down like a sluice. The sailors were therefore unable to navigate the junk farther and had moored her just below a cliff. But, sudden as it had begun, the storm passed over; the waves subsided, the rain ceased, and the clouds rolled back, revealing the great moon hung like a wheel in the sky and doubly as bright as usual by reason of the recent rain.

And Po-ya, seated in the cabin of the junk, alone and melancholy, told his servant to set some incense on the brazier and burn it, for he wished to play a tune upon his

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lute to dispel his vapours. The man did so, and then bore the lute respectfully to his master and laid it duly upon the table. Po-ya opened the case, and, taking out the instrument, tuned it, turning the pegs, and then began to thrum forth an air. But before he had finished it, beneath his fingers one of the strings broke—*hua-là!*

Po-ya started in surprise. He ordered his servant to go and inquire of the sailors the name of the place where they were anchored; and the man brought back word that they had anchored below the bank just where they happened to be when the storm broke; that there were trees and reeds there, but no habitation of man.

Po-ya was most astonished at this information. "To think that this should be a wild place!" he said. "If we had been near a city or village, I would have said that some learned scholar had been listening by stealth to the strains of my lute, thus causing the string to change its tone and eventually to break. What man capable of understanding the lute could be found in a wild spot like this? . . . Ah! I have it! Some enemy has sent an assassin here to work my undoing, or a band of robbers must be near, waiting for midnight to board the junk and rob me of my valuables!"

So he told his retainers to jump on shore and search for evildoers hidden among the willows or amid the recesses of the reed beds. His men prepared to do as they were bidden, and clustered together in a band, when suddenly a human voice was heard addressing them from the shore.

"Do not be alarmed, oh captain!" it said, "I am no base robber or pirate, but a humble wood-cutter. I was coming home late from my work and was caught by the storm; my rain hat and cloak were of no avail, so I took refuge under a ledge of rock, and, hearing the majestic strains produced by a superior person, I stayed a-while to listen."

"What?" laughed Po-ya, "a wood-cutter among the mountains! And he dares to say that he listened to the lute! This is indeed a most mysterious matter! But I need not

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trouble to make inquiries. Tell him, my men, to be off about his business!"

The man, however, did not move, but from the cliff above with a loud voice made reply.

"Your Excellency," he said, "you are mistaken in what you say. Who does not know that 'in a village of only ten houses there may yet be found those of learning and honour,' and that 'if there be a superior person within your gates, another, by the power of attraction, may perhaps be found outside'? If you, sir, think it strange that in so wild a spot there may be found one who can understand a lute, what is my astonishment that in the same spot at dead of night there is one who can play it!"

And Po-ya, seeing that he who uttered these words could be no ordinary person, was inclined to believe that, after all, he had really happened upon a connoisseur, so he told his followers not to trouble the man, and came out and stood in the doorway of the cabin. Here, his anger now turned to a pleasurable anticipation, he called out: "You, sir, the superior person upon the bank! If indeed you understand the lute, you have been standing there for some time, and you must know what tune it was that I was playing just now. Tell me, please, its name!"

"If I, your servant, had not known, sir," the man replied, "I should not have been attracted by it! Your Excellency was playing 'The Lament of Confucius for Yen Hui,' as set for the lute, and this song runs as follows:

"'Lament with me! Fate has cut off Yen Hui ere his prime,
With grief our temples, once so black, are whitened o'er with rime.
By poverty oppressed, yet he his cheerfulness retained, . . .'

and there it was, sir, that your string broke, before you had played the fourth line, which if I remember rightly runs:

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"'And through the years to all mankind a pattern has remained.'"

And on hearing these words, Po-ya's pleasure was extreme. "No common man are you, my master," he said. "But you are far from me with this bank between us! Question and answer are difficult at such a distance! . . . Ho, retainers! Place the gang-plank and the hand-rail in position, and request that master to come on board that we may talk awhile!"

His retainers did his bidding, and the man came on board, and proved indeed to be a wood-cutter. On his head he wore a bamboo-leaf hat; round his shoulders was thrown a rain-cloak of grass; in his hand he bore the pointed stake on which he carried his faggots; in his girdle was stuck his woodsman's chopper; and on his feet he wore sandals of rushes. And the retainers, when they saw that it was indeed a wood-cutter, were at a loss to know how to treat him and looked at one another in perplexity.

"Hi, you wood-cutter!" said one. "When you go below to see our master and he asks you questions, you must be careful how you reply! He is a great minister and you must treat him with due deference!"

But the wood-cutter proved to be a person of independent spirit. "You gentlemen," he said, "have no need to speak to me rudely. Wait, I pray you, until I have adjusted my dress, and I will then go below and wait upon your master." And so saying he removed his bamboo hat and revealed a black cloth band tied round his head. He took off his grass rain-cloak, showing that he was clad beneath in a blue cloth shirt, a girdle, and short breeches. And in so doing he betrayed neither fear nor hurry, but with dignity he put together his stake and his axe, his hat and his cloak, and laid them neatly outside the cabin entrance. Then he took off his sandals and cleaned the mud from them before putting them on again. And, having

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adjusted them, he stepped down to the cabin, which was lit up by the bright beams of candles placed upon the table. The wood-cutter entered and made a deep obeisance to Po-ya, but did not kneel before him. "Your Excellency!" he said, "I salute you!"

Now Po-ya was, as has been explained, the envoy of the Chin State and he was not accustomed to look upon any man clad in so unceremonious a fashion; and to stand up and exchange courtesies with such an individual would have been beneath his dignity. But as he had asked him to come on board the junk, he could hardly order him away, so he forced himself to acknowledge the salute, which he did with a barely perceptible movement.

"My worthy man," he said, "we will not stand upon ceremony." And so saying he motioned to the servant to place a chair for the guest, whereupon the man drew out a low stool and placed it as far as possible from his master.

Then Po-ya, with a minimum of courtesy, and pursing his lips up in disdain, said "Sit down!" in such a manner as to denote his conscious superiority. And the wood-cutter made none of the usual self-deprecatory display, but sat down immediately and remained sitting proudly bolt upright. Po-ya, seeing that he was not more humble in demeanour, became resentful and neither inquired the stranger's name nor called for tea, but sat far a while without speaking, so as to mark his displeasure.

"And so it was you," he said at length, "that listened on the bank just now to the strains of my lute?"

"Though I hardly venture to say so," the wood-cutter replied, "it was indeed none other than myself."

"If then you were able to appreciate the strains of the lute," Po-ya continued, "you must know concerning the origin of the instrument; who it was that first made it; and of the good that comes of playing upon it?"

But as he asked this, the captain of the junk entered and reported that the wind was now blowing favourably and that

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the moon was shining as brightly as daylight; he therefore craved instructions for weighing anchor. Whereat Po-ya told him to wait a while.

And the wood-cutter answered: "If, sir, I were to reply at length to your inquiry, I fear that I should considerably delay your departure!"

"I shall be so surprised," replied Po-ya, "if you know anything about the matter, that I should be willing to forfeit my official rank! A little delay, therefore, will do no great harm!"

"In that case, sir," the man replied, "I will even venture to explain this thing.

"The lute," he went on, "was first fashioned by the Emperor Fu Hsi. He observed the divine effulgence of the five planets shining down upon the Wu T'ung tree and he saw a pair of phoenixes alight upon the tree in reverence—that phoenix which is the king of all fowls, who eats not at all except of the seed of the bamboo, who roosts only upon the Wu T'ung tree, who drinks not except at a fountain of wine! And the Emperor Fu Hsi knew that the wood of the Wu T'ung tree was the best of all woods, and, having received the essential breath of heaven, was the most fitting to be fashioned into a musical instrument. So he had the tree cut down. The stem of it was three-and-thirty feet in height and thus it corresponded with the three-and-thirty tiers of heaven. He had it cut asunder into three equal parts, to correspond with the three benignant forces of nature—Heaven, Earth and Man. The topmost part he took and sounded, but the note that it emitted was too pitched, so he rejected this part as being too highly light. The lowest part he took and sounded, but the note that it emitted was not clear, so this part he rejected as being too heavy. But the middle part when sounded gave out a note neither too high nor too low, but evenly pitched and sonorous. So this part he caused to be placed in running water, where it was soaked

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for seventy-two days to correspond with the seventy-two divisions of the solar terms in every year. Then he dried it in the shade, and, choosing an auspicious date and time, he made a musical instrument out of it by the hand of the skilled worker, Liu Tzu-ch'i—an instrument that was fitted to make such music as is heard on the Jasper Lake in the land of the Queen Mother of the West. Thus it was called the Jasper Lute.

"And the manner of the instrument was as follows. Its length was three feet, six inches, and one-tenth, to correspond with the 361 degrees of the circle which is made by the sun in its course around the earth. At its upper end it was eight inches wide to correspond with the eight annual festivals; at its lower end it was four inches wide to correspond with the four seasons; its depth was two inches, to correspond with the two divisions of the Great Monad. One end he called the Golden Slave, the middle he called the Jade Damsel and the other end he called the Fairy. There were also the two sounding-holes which he called the Dragon Pool and the Phoenix Pond, and the jade pegs and the golden studs to regulate the strings. Twelve studs were made to correspond with the twelve months of the year, and one more to represent the intercalary month.

"At first there were five strings, to correspond with the five elements—Metal, Wood, Water, Fire and Earth; and their five notes were called Kung, Shang, Chiao, Chih and Yü. In the days of Yao and Shun they played the five-stringed lute and to it sang the Poem of the South Wind. But later on, when Wen Wang, the first of the Chou emperors, was cast into prison at Yu Li, his sorrowing son, Po I-k'ao, added one string. High and resonant was the note that it gave, expressing grief and resentment; it was called the string of Wen. And again later, when Wu Wang, the junior son of Wen Wang had fought successfully and there was singing and dancing in the land, yet another string was added, and the note that it gave expressed apprehension

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followed by exultant joy. This was called the string of Wu.

"Thus there were first the five strings for the notes Kung, Shang, Chiao, Chih and Yü, and after the addition of these two strings, the instrument was called the Wen-Wu seven-stringed lute. And it was laid down that there should be Six Adverse Occasions and Seven Unfavourable Conditions when the lute should not be played; and furthermore there were Eight Advantages which the sound of it possessed over all other forms of music.

"The Six Adverse Occasions are these: during intense cold; during great heat; during high wind; during heavy rain; during loud thunder; and during a snowstorm. At such times the lute should not be played.

"The Seven Unfavourable Conditions are these: when the player is within sound of mourning; or of other music; when the player is occupied with affairs; or has not recently bathed; when the player is not dressed with neatness; or has not burned incense; and when a person of understanding is not by to listen. At such times the lute should not be played.

"The Eight Advantages that the sound of the lute has over all other forms of music are as follows: Happiness; Sweetness; Subtilty; Elegance; Sadness; Strength; Softness; Resonance.

"The lute when played would create an atmosphere of beauty and virtue. It would still the awesome roaring of the tiger, or the eerie shrieking of the ape.

"Such are the benefits of its elegant strains!"

And when Po-ya heard this dissertation, delivered as easily as the flowing of water, he was amazed and thought that even if it were a piece of recitation learned by rote, yet it was a creditable performance. "But I will put him to a further test," he thought. And then, addressing him no longer in the peremptory fashion which he had used before, he said:

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"And since you are acquainted with the principles of music, sir, I would remind you of a certain occasion when Confucius was playing the lute in his house. Yen Hui entered from without, and heard a strain of melancholy in the music; he thought that he detected a suggestion of lust for slaughter in his master's playing! In astonishment he asked the cause, and Confucius replied as follows: 'As I sat playing the lute, I saw a cat which had just caught a mouse; and I desired that the cat should hold the mouse, fearing lest it should escape. And thus my sentiments were betrayed in the music of my lute.'

"From this I know that music played within the sacred circle is not without its definite meaning. Now if I, in playing, try to express my thoughts, could you, sir, do you suppose, guess those thoughts when you hear my music?"

"In the Canon of Poetry," answered the wood-cutter, "there is a passage which runs: 'The thoughts that others think, I feel within my heart.' Please therefore, Your Excellency, play a few bars, and I will try to guess the meaning. And if I fail, I pray that Your Excellency will not take it amiss!"

So Po-ya replaced the broken string on his lute and then, after sitting a while in silence, his thoughts turned toward the lofty mountains, and he played out a wild air. And when the music ceased the wood-cutter said in admiration: "Beautiful! What lofty strains! Your Excellency must have been thinking of great heights!"

To this Po-ya made no reply, but sat again a-while, motionless in thought. And again he played upon the lute, thinking the while of the flowing of great rivers. And the wood-cutter again exclaimed in admiration: "Beautiful! What rolling strains! Your thoughts were of the flowing streams!"

Po-ya was astounded that the other had twice guessed the purport of his music, and pushing his lute aside he rose and made a reverential obeisance to him, saying as he did

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so: "I have been grievously lacking in courtesy! Truly within the unpolished stone there lies a vein of lustrous jade! If from his clothes alone a man is to be appraised, who in this instance would not have overlooked such wondrous talent! What, oh master, is your honourable appellation?"

"Your servant's name is Chung Hsi," replied the wood-cutter with a bow; "and my lowly *hao* is Tzu-ch'i," and Po-ya listened in an attitude of deference. The wood-cutter then asked him his name and where he held office.

"This humble official," was the reply, "is called Po Jui. I am employed at the court of the Chin State, and am now visiting your honourable country in the capacity of envoy." And, each having introduced himself to the other, Po-ya requested Tzu-ch'i to take the seat appropriate to an honoured guest, while he himself took that of the host. He then ordered tea to be brought, and subsequently called for wine to be prepared and poured out.

"Let us take this opportunity," he said, "of exchanging talk, and please forgive my former lack of deference"—a courtesy which the wood-cutter acknowledged suitably. The servant then placed the lute on one side and the two men took their seats at the table and drank to each other.

"You, my master, have the speech of a man of the Ch'u State," said Po-ya, "but I have not yet heard where is your honoured abode?"

"It is not far from this place," replied the other. "My humble home is in the village called Chi Hsien ('Assemblage of Virtue'), which lies under the Hill of the Saddle."

"The place is aptly named," remarked Po-ya, nodding his head in approval. "And what is your honoured calling?"

"It is that, as you see, of a wood-cutter," was the answer, whereat Po-ya exclaimed that though he would not venture to offer advice, he thought that with such outstanding talents as Tzu-ch'i undoubtedly possessed, he should certainly pass the examinations and attain to official rank, registering his

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name in the records of state. "Here amid the forests and the streams," he said, "among wood-cutters and herds, your name will perish as the grass and scrub die down in autumn. And this, in my opinion, would be wrong."

"I will not deceive you," said the other. "My two aged parents are still living with me and I have no brother to help me tend them. I must continue my calling to provide for their daily needs while they are still with me. And were I to be offered the office of one of the three great ministers of state, I would not for one day change my present condition!"

"Such filial devotion as this," said Po-ya, "would be difficult to find elsewhere!" And the two men poured out wine for each other, Tzu-ch'i showing no surprise at the minister's politeness. But Po-ya became more and more deferential and asked Tzu-ch'i how old he was, to which the latter replied that he had wasted twenty-four years.

"And I," returned Po-ya, "am your senior by ten years. If you do not reject my offer, I now propose that we should make a pact of brotherhood; then we shall not have met in vain!"

"Your Excellency is surely making a mistake," replied Tzu-ch'i with a smile. "You are a renowned minister in your honourable country, while I am an insignificant person living in an obscure village! How can I venture to agree to such a proposition and thus be the cause of so great a loss of prestige to you?"

"I have met men of all parts," replied Po-ya, "and who could know the heart of another as you do? I am for ever flying hither and thither in the dust and the wind, and if I could become on intimate terms with you, I should regard it as the greatest good fortune of my life. If I, being rich and honourable, were to despise you for your poverty and mean estate, what sort of a man would you hold Yü Jui to be!"

So saying, he ordered his servant to light the great candles on the table of ceremony and set on fire the sticks

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of fine incense, and there in the cabin of the junk he kotowed eight times before Tzu-ch'i. Po-ya, as the senior in years, became the elder brother, and Tzu-ch'i became the younger brother; and they avowed to address each other as such from that time forward and to be faithful to one another in life or death. Then Po-ya ordered his servant to prepare some more hot wine and Tzu-ch'i persuaded Po-ya to take the more honourable seat. They placed for each other the wine cups and utensils and thus conversed pleasantly over their meal.

By bonds of mutual interest to one another drawn
And heart to heart in sympathy, they talked until the dawn.

And indeed they derived so much pleasure from their talk that they did not notice the waning of the moon or the paling of the stars and did not see the eastern sky become grey as the sun began to rise.

The sailors, however, got up from their slumbers and prepared the sails and the ropes in anticipation of weighing anchor, and at last Tzu-ch'i arose to take his leave. Po-ya poured out some more wine for him as a parting cup, and then grasped his hand in affection.

"Alas, my brother," he said with a sigh, "why did we meet so late; why must we part so soon?"; and Tzu-ch'i unconsciously dropped a tear which fell into the cup that he was holding just before he drained it in farewell. He then filled Po-ya's cup for him and gave it to him reverentially, for their parting was indeed hard.

"I have by no means said my say to you," exclaimed Po-ya, "and I would fain retain you on board this junk to accompany me for a few days longer. Could you, my brother, agree to this?"

"I should indeed be most willing," replied the other; "but my parents are very old, and, as the Master said, 'When father and mother are with you, do not roam!'"

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"Since they are still alive, I pray you go to them," said Po-ya, "and ask them to come to Chin Yang, the capital of my adopted country, and visit me; for, to complete your quotation, 'If you do travel, go to a set place!'"

"I will not lightly enter into obligations which I may not be able to carry out," replied Tzu-ch'i. "It is almost certain that if I put this proposal before my parents they would not be able to agree. Should you, so many thousand *li* away, be disappointed in my failure to carry out such a promise, then would my fault be doubly great."

"Your words," said Po-ya, "are those of a superior person. Enough! Then must I come to you next year."

"And when may I expect you?" asked Tzu-ch'i; "for I shall be waiting for you with all deference."

"In the Autumn," answered Po-ya, after reckoning the months upon his fingers. "This morning's sun dawns upon the sixteenth day of the eighth moon. Within five or six days of next Autumn Festival, I shall be with you. If the middle third of the month passes and the last third draws to its close before you have news of my coming, then shall I have fallen below the standard of a superior person!" And he called upon his writer to note in his diary the name of the place where his brother Chung dwelt and the date on which they were to meet again.

"And so," said Tzu-ch'i, "I shall be waiting upon yonder bank next year, during the five or six days about the mid-autumn festival. I shall not dare to permit of any mistake. But, it is now daylight and I must leave you!"

"Stay one moment more!" said Po-ya, and he ordered his servant to bring up two pieces of yellow gold, fashioned after the shape of the tablet held by a minister in audience; and these he presented to Tzu-ch'i with both hands without waiting to wrap them up in any covering. "These," he said, "are an insignificant token of my respect towards you. You may buy therewith some delicacy for your honoured parents. We are two scholars of blood relationship, so I

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pray you not to reject my offering by reason of its inferior value!"

And Tzu-ch'i did not venture to refuse the gift, so putting the gold away, he took his leave. With tears streaming down his face he left the cabin. He gathered up his wooden stake; he put on again his cloak of grass and his leaf hat, and stuck once more his axe in his girdle. The sailors placed for him the gang-plank and hand-rail in position and he stepped on shore, Po-ya accompanying him to the prow of the junk. Thus they parted in tears.

II

I will not here relate of how Tzu-ch'i went home. Let me rather tell of Yü Po-ya. The drum was beaten as a signal for the starting of the junk, and his journey was resumed. But the beauty of the scenery had no further attraction for him, so occupied was he with thoughts of his new friend. For many days he journeyed and then he stopped the junk and went ashore. The inhabitants of those parts recognised him for the great minister of the Chin State and did not venture to treat him but with deference, so they furnished a chariot and horses for the continuation of his journey to Chin Yang, the capital, where he had audience with the king. Of all this I will not tell at length.

And the days and the nights sped by; winter followed autumn, and spring, unnoticed, had followed winter and had turned to summer again, but all this time Po-ya had kept Tzu-ch'i constantly in mind, not a day passing without thoughts of his distant friend recurring to him. And when the mid-autumn festival drew near he petitioned the king of Chin for permission to go and visit his home once more. This was granted, and Po-ya prepared his baggage for the long journey by water.

When he went on board his junk he ordered the sailors to tell him each day the names of the places at which they

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anchored. And as it fell out, it was just on the fifteenth night of the eighth moon that the men reported to him that they were drawing near the Hill of the Saddle. Po-ya was well able to remember about where he had anchored in the previous year and had met Tzu-ch'i, and at that spot he ordered the men to moor the junk, letting go the anchor and tying up to a stake upon the bank.

That night the moon shone bright as day, and a shaft of moonlight came through below the red curtains of the cabin, which had been rolled up at Po-ya's order. He came out and stood upon the prow of the junk and glanced upwards at the constellations. And the great stretch of water seemed to unite with the bosom of the heavens and form one vast expanse, the whole being illuminated by the moon almost as brightly as though the sun were shining. Po-ya's thoughts turned to that day of the previous year when he and his friend the wood-cutter had met in the moonlight.

"Now that I have returned," he thought, "on just such another brilliant night, he ought to be on the bank waiting for me as he promised. Why is there no sign of him? It cannot surely be that he has forgotten!" and he paused, pondering, to divine the cause.

"Ah! I have it!" he said at length to himself. "The junks pass here in countless numbers. That which I am travelling upon at present is quite different in appearance from the one I used last year. My brother is unable to recognise it as mine. But last year it was because I played upon the lute that he came. Thus did our friendship begin. I will therefore again play a strain, and he will hear and surely come to me!"

So he ordered his servant to place the lute on its stand on the prow of the junk and to burn incense and set out a stool. When all was prepared Po-ya opened the lute-case and tuned the lute, turning the pegs. But hardly had he begun to play when the "Shang" string gave out a note of unspeakable sadness and resentment. Po-ya stopped playing.

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"Ai-ya! What a melancholy sound that 'Shang' string has!" he said. "In my brother's house there must surely be occasion for mourning. He said last year that his parents were both old; it must be that either his father or his mother has died. A filial son is he and he tended his parents with the greatest assiduity. It is better far that he should neglect his promise to me than that he should omit his obligation to them! When daylight comes I will go on shore and seek him."

So, telling his servant to put away the lute, he went to his bed; yet all night long he never closed his eyes in sleep, but lay awake and longed for the dawn. And he watched the shadows thrown by the moonlight becoming fainter until at length the sun appeared above the mountain tops. He then rose and performed his toilet, putting on a plain hat and clothes of an ordinary citizen and went on shore, telling his servant to accompany him with the lute. He also instructed him to bring ten bars of yellow gold to give to his brother as a funeral offering should it prove that he was in mourning. These preparations completed, he walked slowly in the direction of the Hill of the Saddle.

He had already walked some ten *li* when he came to the mouth of the valley along which he had been walking. Here he halted, and his servant asked the reason.

"The hills divide here, north and south," he replied; "and the road forks east and west. Both appear to be good roads and we could proceed by either, but I do not know which of them leads to the Chi Hsien village. We will wait here until some one comes who knows this district and then we can ask the way."

He sat down therefore on a boulder, and the servant stepped back and waited behind him. In a little while they beheld an elderly man coming along the road from the left hand. He wore a long beard which hung down like strings of white jade, and his hair resembled braided silver. On his head he wore a bamboo hat and his other garments were

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those of a rustic. In his left hand he held a staff, while in his right he carried a bamboo basket.

Po-ya rose and after straightening his robes, saluted the old man. The other very slowly placed his basket upon the ground and, still grasping his staff, returned the courtesy. "How, sir, can I serve you?" he asked.

"I beg leave to ask, sir," replied Po-ya, "concerning these two roads. Which of them leads to the village of Chi Hsien?"

"There are two villages of that name," said the old man. "The road to the left leads to Upper Chi Hsien, while the road to the right leads to Lower Chi Hsien. The two villages lie some thirty *li* apart, the one from the other, upon the highroad, and where you have emerged from the valley behind you, you are just half-way between them, for they are distant fifteen *li* east and west, in either direction. To which village do you desire to go, sir?"

To this Po-ya had no reply. "My brother is a man of intelligence," he thought, "and why he spoke so ambiguously I cannot imagine. When we met he knew that there were two Chi Hsien villages, Upper and Lower, and he should have explained himself more clearly." And he paused in thought, not knowing what to say.

"I see that you are perplexed, sir," said the old man. "Your guide could not have told you that there were two villages but merely mentioned the name common to both, so that you cannot now find your way." And when Po-ya said that that indeed was the case, the old man went on.

"But in both villages," he said, "there are together but a score of houses, and the inhabitants are all those who have fled away to escape the troubled times or are those who seek seclusion from the world. I have lived among these hills for many years, and there is a true saying that when a man has lived upon the land for thirty years all his neighbours are related to him by marriage. Among the inhabitants of these villages all are either my relatives or my

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friends, while you, in going to Chi Hsien, are surely seeking some acquaintance. Tell me his name and I will inform you where he lives."

"I am going to the Chung household," replied Po-ya.

"And whom do you wish to see in the Chung household?" asked the old man.

"Tzu-ch'i," said Po-ya.

And when the old man heard these words his dim old eyes filled with tears, which dropped down in a stream, and he wept as though his heart would break. At last he emitted a terrible cry and sobbed out:

"Chung Tzu-ch'i was my son! Last year on the fifteenth day of the eighth moon he was coming home late from his wood-cutting when he fell in with the minister from the Chin State, Yü Po-ya by name. He talked with him and they became very sympathetic towards one another. And when the minister left he gave him some yellow gold. My son bought books for his further study, and I, feeble and old, had no power to restrain him. By day he carried heavy loads of wood; by night he studied excessively. His strength failed and a grievous wasting sickness fell upon him. In a few months he was dead!"

Po-ya received these tidings like a man receiving his death wound. When the old man began to speak his tears flowed like fountains, and at last, with a great cry he swooned against the boulder by which he stood and then fell prostrate to the ground. The old man, in surprise and alarm, dashed away his tears and raised him up. Then turning to the servant he said: "Who, please, is this gentleman?"

"Yü Po-ya!" replied the man in a whisper.

"My son's dear friend!" exclaimed old Chung, and he supported Po-ya until consciousness had returned. The latter then, sitting on the ground, gave vent to his great sorrow. With both hands he beat upon his breast, and sobbed and groaned in his affliction.

"My noble brother!" he exclaimed. "When yesterday

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my junk was anchored, I dared to say that you had forgotten your tryst! And you were already a spirit among the Nine Springs! (Note 10). Talent indeed was yours, but not long life!"

The old man, again wiping away his own tears, tried to comfort Po-ya; and the minister, his fit of weeping over, rose to his feet and again made obeisance to Mr Chung, whom he did not dare to call by any other name than that of "Uncle," to show that he regarded himself as the near relation of the dead son.

"My uncle," he asked, "where is your honoured son's coffin? Is it still within your house or has the funeral already taken place?"

"I will tell you of this matter," the old man made reply. "When my son was on his deathbed, I and my stupid thorn (Note 11) sat before his pallet, and my son with his dying words directed as follows: 'The length of a man's life is a matter solely within the ordering of heaven; I have been neglectful of my duties as a filial son; after my death, therefore, I beg you to bury my body on the slope of the Hill of the Saddle. For there it is that I undertook to meet Yü Po-ya, the minister from Chin, and I would fain keep my promise.' So this old person could not disregard the instructions received from dying lips. On the left hand side of the road along which you have already passed, sir, there is a mound of earth but freshly raised. That is the grave of my son. To-day, just one hundred days after his death, I was on the way to burn a bundle of paper money at his grave when I happened to meet you, sir."

"Since the case is thus," replied Po-ya, "I will go with you to the grave and ko-tow before it." So, telling his servant to carry the old man's basket for him, he followed; old Mr Chung led the way, leaning on his staff, and the servant brought up the rear. They re-entered the valley and there found, at the side of the road, a newly-made grave mound.

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Po-ya adjusted his robes and then bowed down before it, saying: "Oh, most virtuous younger brother! When you were on earth you were a man of great intelligence; now that you are dead, you are doubtless occupying a high place in the unseen world! Your foolish elder brother now takes a last farewell of you!"

And, his salutation finished, he began to weep anew in the most unrestrained manner, so that he startled the inhabitants who dwelt all about the neighbouring mountains. And they, no matter whether they were indoors or had already left their houses, far and near, all heard the sound of Po-ya's sobbing and bitter lamentation, and all flocked to ascertain the cause.

Finding that it was a great minister from the Court of Chin who had come to make sacrifice at the tomb of Chung Tzu-ch'i, they surrounded the grave in a great crowd to watch. But Po-ya had brought no sacrificial offering and had not therefore the wherewithal to express his feelings of respect and affection. So telling his servant to bring forth his jasper lute, he removed it from its case and set it down upon the altar stone in front of the grave. Then sitting cross-legged on the ground before it, his tears still coursing down his face in twin rivulets, he played a stave upon the instrument.

But the spectators, hearing the strains of the lute, clapped their hands (Note 12) in amusement and broke out into peals of laughter.

"My uncle," said Po-ya, "this humble official plays a dirge upon the lute in honour of a virtuous younger brother and to express my deep sorrow. Why do all these people laugh?"

"These rustics," was the reply, "know nothing of music, and look upon a musical instrument as a thing wherewith to express feelings of joy. And for this reason they laugh at the fancied incongruity."

"Since it is thus," said Po-ya, "I would ask you if the

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nature of the strains that I have played is known to you, my uncle?"

"This old person, in early youth did indeed have some knowledge of music," answered Mr Chung. "But now, in my old age, my five senses are dimmed. I am stupid, and I did not understand the music."

"I was following the promptings of my heart in my playing," said Po-ya, "and I was improvising a brief funeral dirge for your honoured son. This I will now sing for you, my uncle."

"Sing on!" replied Chung, "for I am listening."

And Po-ya sang as follows:

"A year ago! How well I call to mind
That joyful meeting on the river bank.
To-day I come my comrade dear to find,
But he is gone; the world is now a blank!
Nothing remains except a lonely grave,
Alas! how cruel. Bitter is the smart!
Hot tears in rivulets my features lave,
Dead is my hope; thrice broken is my heart!
In joy I came, in woe I now depart.
To mark my grief thick clouds the stream enfold,
Tzu-ch'i was more to me than precious gold,
Upon this earth his like I'll ne'er behold.
My song is done; I'll evermore be mute!
My friend is dead; now dies my jasper lute!

Po-ya, his song ended, drew from his sleeve a short dagger and slashed it across the strings of his lute, and then, raising the instrument aloft with both hands, he brought it down with all his force upon the sacrificial stone, breaking the lute into fragments. The jade pegs were scattered, the golden studs came out and flew in all directions.

And old Mr Chung in surprise and alarm asked the reason for this act of destruction, and Po-ya replied in verse as follows:

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"My lute I break. Its voice was killed by woe.
My friend is gone; no one is left to hear me!
The friends of other men may come and go,
But I shall never find my comrade near me!"

"Alas! Alas!" sighed the old man. "How sad! How sad!"

"And now I must ask you, my honoured uncle," said Po-ya, "whether your lofty dwelling is actually in the upper or the lower Chi Hsien village?"

"My lowly hut, sir," replied Mr Chung, "is in Upper Chi Hsien, and it is in number the eighth household. But why do you ask this?"

"So great is the wound that I have sustained," answered Po-ya, "that I could not bear to accompany you, my uncle, back to your home. But I have brought with me ten bars of yellow gold, which I wish to give to you. One-half is a present to yourself, for your son's sake, to buy you delicacies withal; one-half is to be spent in purchasing a few acres of ground which will produce a small income of money, and this I desire shall be expended in keeping in order the tomb of your honoured son. When I shall have returned to the country of my adoption I intend to resign from my official post and retire to my home. I shall then return to the village of Chi Hsien to fetch you, my uncle, and your honoured wife; and I will keep you in my own home for the remainder of your lives. For I am Tzu-ch'i and Tzu-ch'i is myself. I pray you not to regard me as one who is not of your own family."

Thus saying, he ordered his servant to bring out the gold, which he then handed over to Mr Chung. In tears he then bowed down to the ground, and Mr Chung returned his obeisance in like manner. Then after a further prolonged talk they parted.

Now this story tells how Yü Po-ya broke his lute as a sacrifice to his friend; and one of a later generation

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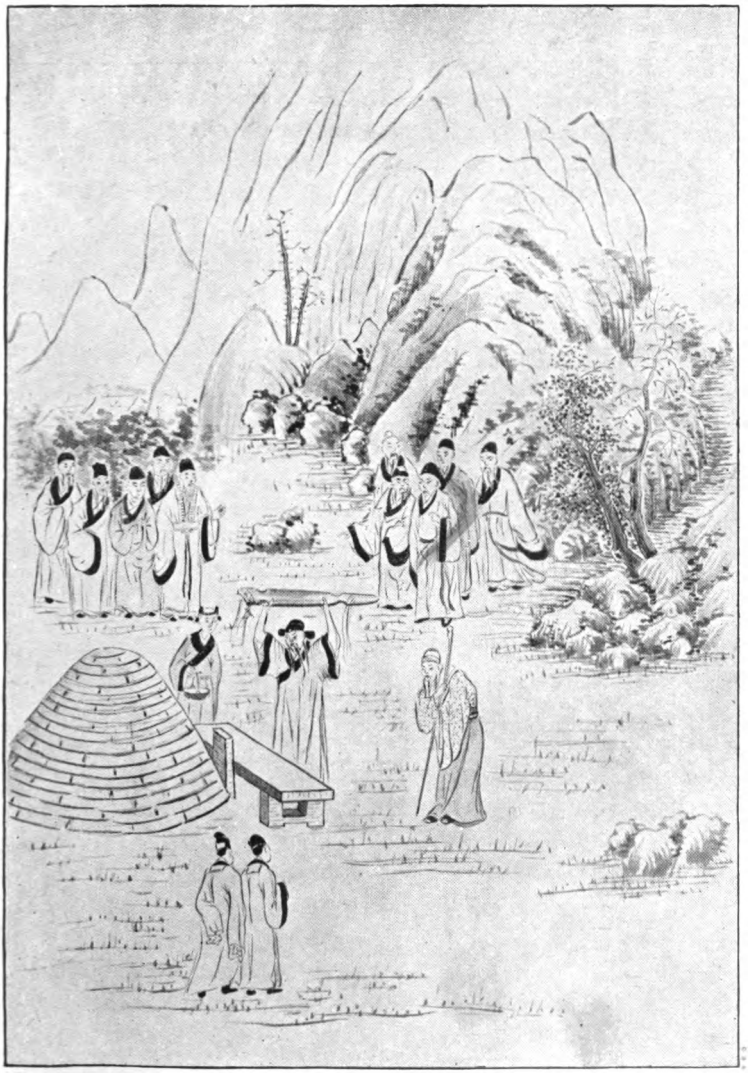

The breaking of the Lute

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has written the following honorific verse upon its subject:

"E'en among scholars, who to-day esteems true friendship's worth?
Our friends are now but those of power, or wealth, or noble birth!
Great Po-ya and his humble friend have long since passed away,
But the story of his broken lute is told unto this day!"

NOTES

Note 10.—"Nine Springs": the abode of the dead; a Buddhistic phrase.

Note 11.—"Stupid Thorn": my wife. This is the ordinary polite way of speaking of one's own wife to this day, and it might be of interest to trace the origin of this singular expression as a sample of Chinese idiom.

The virtue of the Chinese married woman of convention is in proportion to the plainness of her attire as evincing her thriftiness, and on the Chinese stage a virtuous married woman is always represented by an actor clad in the plainest of garments. For it was laid down by Meng Kuang, the wife of Liang Hung of the Han Dynasty (second century A.D.), that if a married woman is truly virtuous she will use a thorn as a hair-pin (instead of a pin of precious metal) and a skirt of cotton (instead of a silken gown).

The epithet "stupid" is probably self-deprecatory only; *cf.* my "worthless" or "vile" name, my "little dog" (my son), my "hut of reeds" (my house), etc., etc.

Note 12.—Clapping the hands is, in China, an expression of merriment only; not, as with us, of applause.

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THE DIPLOMACY OF LI T'AI-PO

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THE DIPLOMACY OF LI T'AI-PO

I

DURING the reign of the Emperor Hsüan Tsung (Note 13) of the T'ang Dynasty, there lived a son of talent named Li whose *ming* was Po, his *hao* being T'ai-po. A descendant, in the ninth generation, of the Emperor Li Kao of the Liang Dynasty, he was a Szechuen man, his family home being at Chin Chou.

Just before he was born, his mother dreamed a vivid dream wherein she imagined herself to have been delivered of the evening star T'ai-po, and when her son was born he was in consequence called after this star.

Li Po grew to be an exceedingly comely child, with limbs so unusually well knit and proportioned that he looked like a god. At the age of ten years he was intimate with all written books and records, and whenever he spoke it was as one reading a written essay. Men said that his mind was like gold brocade and his words like fine embroidery. Others indeed imagined him to be an immortal descended from on high, so that he was also called Li Tse-hsien (Li the Immortal exiled from Heaven). A poem by the famous Tu Fu alludes to him in the following terms:

"The praises of a genius let me sing,
Surnamed 'The Exile from the Realms on High.'
He poured his verses like the rain in spring,
Bringing the tears e'en to a devil's eye.
And far and wide was noised abroad his name
Which, as a god's, all men did soon revere.
The Son of Heaven recognised his fame
And no one since has proved to be his peer."

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Li Po was also known as The Hermit of Ch'ing Lien (the Bright Lotus). All his life he was extraordinarily addicted to wine (Note 14), and he never desired to hold official rank; his chief delight being in travelling to distant parts, in visiting all the sacred mountains under heaven, and in tasting all the best wines in existence.

In early days he ascended Mount Omi; he then went to live on Mount Yün Meng; and he subsequently retired as a hermit to the mountains of Ch'u Lai, where in the village of Chu Hsi with five companions he used to drink copiously day and night. They were known as the Six Hermits of Chu Hsi.

It was once reported to him that the best of all wines was to be had at Huchou; so, not considering that the distance of a thousand *li* which separated him from that district was too far a journey, he sped thither, and, in a wine-shop in that town, he expanded his bosom and drank to excess until he became oblivious of the existence of others.

And as he sat, the Prefect of the district happened to pass by and heard the drunken singing of Li Po in his madness, so he sent in to inquire who might be the person who was so conducting himself.

Li Po answered in verse as follows:

"Ch'ing Lien am I. Men call me, too, Th' Immortal come to Earth,
Among the wine-pots I have hidden ever since my birth.
And who may be the magnate of Huchou who dares draw nigh
A Sage reincarnated from the golden realms on high?"

The prefect was greatly surprised at this sally, and inquired further if it could really be the famous Li Tse-hsien from Szechuen, whose name he had known so long. Finding that it was indeed no other, he requested the pleasure of Li's acquaintance and, taking him to his home, he enter-

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tained him for ten days. He supplied him with money, and when the poet was about to depart he addressed him as follows:

"You, sir, are of great talent! You could assume the robes of an official just as easily as you could pick up a pin from the floor! Why do you not forthwith go to Ch'ang An and attend the examinations?"

"The affairs of state," replied Li, "are now in great confusion. Only those who push themselves forward meet with success; only those who bribe succeed at the examinations! For me, who do neither the one nor the other of these things, success would not be possible, even though I had the virtues of Confucius or Mencius, or the combined talents of all the sages of ancient days. And that is the reason why I do nothing but drink wine and write poetry, thereby avoiding loss of temper by reason of these examiners!"

"What you say is true," the prefect answered. "And yet who does not know your reputation? Once you arrive at Ch'ang An you will get recommendations from all sides!"

So Li Po took his advice and proceeded to Ch'ang An, the capital. There he went first to visit the Temple of Heaven, where he encountered the Hanlin scholar Ho Chih-chang, to whom he introduced himself. The two exchanged courtesies, and Ho took the poet into a wine-shop, where he put down his sable cloak as a pledge for the wine that they might drink.

At nightfall they were still drinking together, and Ho Chih-Chang took Li Po home with him to spend the night; and they became as brothers. The next day Li Po took his baggage over to the Hanlin's house, and for several days they sat together drinking wine and composing poetry, to the mutual enjoyment of both host and guest.

The time passed very quickly, and before they had realised it the day appointed for the examinations was at hand.

"The Examiner-in-chief just now happens to be Yang

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Kuo-chung, a cousin of the court favourite Yang Kuei Fei," remarked Ho; "while the Assistant Examiner-in-chief is the head eunuch, Kao Li-shih. Both are highly appreciative of good scholarship; but, my worthy brother, if you have no money to buy their favour, you will hardly see the Son of Heaven face to face, be your scholarship never so great! As it happens, however, both the examiners are known to me, and I will write a letter to them so that their favourable attention may be enlisted in advance on your behalf; and it may be that they will increase my prestige by the notice that they will take of what I shall tell them."

Now Li Po was of excellent talent and of the utmost determination; but in view of the difficulties which confronted him, and seeing that he was on such good terms with a member of the Hanlin academy, he made no attempt to interfere with the latter's intention. Hanlin Ho, therefore, wrote his letter to the Examiners-in-chief Yang and Kao.

But when they opened and read it they smiled.

"It is obvious," they said, "that Hanlin Ho has himself pocketed Li Po's bribe, and he now writes this empty letter to us, asking for our good offices and offering nothing in return!"

And they made a special note that when Li Po's essays were submitted, they should make no investigation as to their merit but should at once mark him down as failed.

On the third day of the second moon, the examinations began. And all the famous scholars under heaven were gathered together to write and submit their essays. Li Po, being a man of extraordinary parts, dashed off his essay without even pausing to think, and when it was submitted, Yang Kuo-chang gave a glance at it and seeing Li Po's name upon it did not look at what he had written but scrawled his pen through it.

"A student of this sort," he exclaimed loudly, "is only fitted to stand by when one writes, and hold the ink-slab!"

"And I do not consider him fit even for that service,"

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added Kao Li-shih. "As far as I am concerned, I would only employ him to pull off my boots and change my socks!"

And with that, they ordered the attendants to eject Li with violence from the examination hall. For—

"Essays to please the world at large are hardly worth a thought.
The critics are the only ones whose favour should be sought!"

But when Li Po saw that his essay was thus wrongfully scored through by the examiners, his wrath uprose to heaven. He returned to the Hanlin's house and before him swore a great oath that he would never rest content until he had himself achieved success to such an extent that he would be in a position to command that his own ink-slab be held for him by Yang Kuo-chung, and to have his own boots pulled off by Kao Li-shih!

"Calm your troubled mind," said Hanlin Ho. "Rest quietly under my roof until the examinations are again held in three years' time and other examiners are appointed. You will then be sure of success." So every day Li Po spent his time in drinking wine and writing poetry, and the days and the nights sped by until a year had passed.

And then one day there unexpectedly arrived at the capital an ambassador from one of the barbarian countries with a despatch from his lord, and a messenger was sent from the court to Hanlin Ho to bid him entertain the envoy fitly at the Hall of Tribute. And the next morning the Grand Councillors received the despatch which the envoy had brought, and the emperor summoned representatives of the Hanlin academy to interpret it. But not one of them understood a single word!

They knelt in rows beneath the golden steps of the throne and made memorial as follows:

"This despatch appears to consist of marks made by the feet of birds! Your humble servants are ashamed to con-

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fess that their scholarship is insufficient, for of the writing not one character is recognizable!"

The Son of Heaven, hearing this memorial, called upon the Examiner-in-chief Yang Kuo-chung to explain the despatch, but when he was shown it he regarded it with both eyes wide open, staring foolishly, and was equally at a loss.

The emperor then asked all the officers of the court, both civil and military, but there was not a man of them who was not wholly ignorant of the meaning, and thus it was impossible to tell whether the despatch was written in friendly or in threatening terms! The Dragon Face became suffused with rage, and he called them all and abused them.

"Useless, indeed, are you all, oh learned officials civil and military!" he cried. "There is amongst you not one trustworthy scholar capable of saving Us from humiliation! If We cannot tell what sort of a message this is, how can We send a fitting reply when We dismiss this barbarian envoy? The barbarians will then be able to laugh at Us and look askance at Our court! We must needs look to Our arms and prepare for battle, taking up a position on the frontier! Thus shall action be taken: We now set a limit of three days. If in that time no one can bring Us an interpretation of the barbarians' message, the salaries of all of you shall be stopped. If after six days there is still no interpretation, you will all be cashiered. And if after nine days there is still lacking a man capable of dealing with the situation, the crime of all of you will be fixed, and other and more worthy scholars will be found to take your places! Thus will the dignity of the state be upheld!"

This pronouncement was immediately recorded as an edict, and all the officials were abashed and had no word to say, nor durst anyone kneel down to utter another verbal memorial. The Son of Heaven was the more annoyed at this, but the courtiers dispersed.

Hanlin Ho returned to his house, where he handed the

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despatch at once to Li Po. The latter took it and looking at it smiled sardonically.

"What a pity it is," he said, "that I, an obscure person named Li, failed to pass at the examinations last year! I am not now an official and therefore am unable to save his sacred majesty from humiliation!"

Hanlin Ho started with astonishment at these words.

"You, my illustrious brother," he exclaimed, "of your excellent learning are capable of almost any feat of scholarship. Is it possible that you can understand this despatch of the barbarians? If so I would fain bring you before the emperor and recommend you for an audience!"

So, on the following day, Hanlin Ho went to court and, stepping out of the ranks of the officials, made memorial.

"I crave leave to address your majesty," he said, "and to submit that I have at the present moment in my house a scholar named Li Po, who of his excellent learning is capable of very much. And your servant is of the opinion that he is our only hope of obtaining an interpretation of the despatch of the barbarians."

The emperor immediately expressed his satisfaction, and sent a court official to go in haste to Hanlin Ho's house and summon Li Po.

"Your servant is but a wearer of cotton clothes," said Li Po in answer to the summons, "and is of obscure origin, having neither talent nor understanding. There are, moreover, in the court many officials and scholars of the utmost erudition; how should a mere rustic be consulted in such a matter? Your servant would not venture to approach his majesty; to do so would merely be to affront the nobles in the court!" And when he said this he had, of course, in mind the two examiners, Yang and Kao.

So the messenger returned to the palace and reported what Li had said, and the emperor asked Ho Chih-chang what was to be understood from so unusual an attitude.

"Your majesty's servant knows," replied Hanlin Ho,

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"that Li Po's talents are sufficient to cover the earth and that his learning is astounding. But last year at the examinations his essay was rejected by the examiners-in-chief, and he himself was cast out with ignominy from the examination hall. Now therefore he feels reluctant and ashamed to come to your majesty's court, clad in white cotton garments as one who has no degree. I would beseech your majesty to show special grace and send a minister of importance to summon him. He will then, without doubt, present himself."

"This minister's memorial is approved," replied the emperor. "We decree that Li Po be passed as a graduate of the third degree, and that a purple robe, a golden girdle, an official hat and an ivory tablet be forthwith conferred upon him for use when coming to audience. And you yourself," added the emperor, turning to Hanlin Ho, "will go and summon him. See to it that he does not refuse again!"

And Ho Chih-chang, having received these commands, proceded to his home. He explained to Li Po the great anxiety of the emperor to find a scholar capable of dealing with the situation and besought him to interpret the despatch. The poet then at once assumed the raiment that had been sent to him, and made obeisance in the direction of the imperial palace. Then, mounting a horse, he followed Ho Chih-chang to the court.

The emperor was seated on his throne waiting for their arrival, and Li Po, advancing towards the golden steps, bowed, and in a voice that would carry between hill-tops expressed his gratitude, thereafter remaining standing in an attitude of reverential attention.

And the Son of Heaven, when at last he saw Li Po, felt like a poor man who unexpectedly inherits a fortune, like a starving man suddenly confronted with food, like a parched land that unexpectedly receives the rain. And he opened his golden mouth and spoke jade words to the following effect:

"We have now before Us for consideration a despatch

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which has been handed to Us by an ambassador from the barbarians; but no one can be found capable of interpreting its meaning. We have therefore specially sent for you to separate Us from humiliation!"

And Li Po, with body bent, made memorial in reply.

"Your Majesty," he said, "my learning is superficial; my essay was rejected by the examiners-in-chief. His Excellency Kao took your servant and expelled him with violence from the examination hall. Now, this despatch having been received from the barbarians, it is difficult to understand why these illustrious examiners are not ordered to reply, so that the presence of the barbarian envoy may not be tolerated any longer here. As for me, I am a rejected candidate and failed to satisfy the examiners; how can I, then, satisfy the Emperor?"

"You are known to Us," retorted the emperor, "and you are not permitted to refuse!" and so saying, he ordered one of the attendant ministers to hand over the barbarians' despatch to Li Po to read. The latter took it and glanced at it, his dry smile again overspreading his countenance. Then turning towards the throne he translated the document into the T'ang language easily and without the slightest hesitation; and the contents of the despatch were as follows:

"The Great K'o Tu (Note 15) of the land of P'o Hai sends this despatch to the Chief of T'ang.

Since you dared to occupy Korea which is adjacent to Our Country, your soldiers on the frontiers have repeatedly violated Our boundaries. This would seem to have been the result of your instructions.

Such a condition of affairs is not to be endured by Us, and We therefore send an envoy to confer with you on the matter.

You are to surrender to Our Country one hundred and seventy-six cities in Korea.

We will then send you presents, namely, a T'u plant from the Great White Mountain; a roll of K'un cloth from the south sea; a drum from Chai Ch'eng; a deer from Fu Yü; a pig from Cheng Chieh; a horse from Shuai Pin; a roll of

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silk from Wo Chou; some fish from the Mei T'o river; some plums from Ch'iu Tu; some pears from Lo Yo.

These will all be for you!

And if you do not agree to these Our terms, We will bring Our soldiers over to kill you; and you will see who is the stronger, We or you!"

Now when the assembled officials had heard the reading of the barbarians' despatch, they were all greatly astonished and gazed at each other in amazement, for all agreed that such scholarship as that of Li Po could not be found elsewhere. But as for the Son of Heaven, his Dragon Face gave evidence of his displeasure at what he had heard. He remained silent for a long while, and then, turning to the assemblage of civil and military officials, he addressed them as follows:

"The barbarians will soon be moving troops in to occupy Korea! What plan shall we adopt? What countermove can we make?"

And the two ranks of officials, civil and military, stood like statues of wood and images of stone, no one daring to answer. But Ho Chih-chang at last stood forward.

"Since the days of the Emperor T'ai Tsung," he said, "we have made three military expeditions into Korea. No one knows how many lives of men and of beasts were expended, but we were unable to gain any victory and moreover the Imperial treasury was totally depleted. By the grace of Heaven, however, the Korean general, Kai Su-wen, died, and his son, Nan Sheng, quarrelled with his brothers, one of whom led us into the country. The Emperor Kao Tsung then sent the aged generals, Li Chi and Hsüeh Jen-kuei, at the head of a million brave troops, and these, after a hundred battles great and small, prevailed against the enemy.

"Now peace has long reigned and we have neither generals nor men. If war is again waged at the present time it will be difficult to guarantee our success. For military adventures are always attended by disasters of one sort

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or another and it is ever difficult to foretell how long they may last. It is much to be hoped that our Holy Majesty will observe due caution!"

"But how shall We reply to the envoy?" the Son of Heaven asked.

"That Your Majesty must ask Li Po," was the reply. "He will certainly be able to devise a suitable answer."

The emperor then commanded Li Po to speak.

"I beseech Your Majesty not to grieve Your sacred mind in this matter," said the poet. "Let the barbarian envoy be commanded to attend the court to-morrow. I will then write a reply in his presence, and using the script of his own country; and the words that I shall write will bring shame and confusion to his barbarian master and will cause him to return to his allegiance."

"Who then is this K'o Tu?" asked the emperor.

"It is the custom of the land of P'o Hai to call their lord K'o Tu," answered Li Po, "just as the Mohammedans call their lord K'o Han,* as the Turfan barbarians call theirs P'u Tsan, and as the Liu Chiu islanders call theirs Hsi-mo-wei. Each of the barbarian countries has its own custom in this matter."

The Son of Heaven, seeing that Li Po was never at a loss when questioned, was greatly rejoiced in his sacred heart, and immediately made Li Po a member of the Hanlin Academy and ordered a banquet to be held in his honour in the Hall of Golden Bells. And therein strains of music sounded sweetly without cessation, lute and harp swelling the harmonious sound. And dancing-girls and handmaidens of wondrous beauty were present, and wine was brought in choice goblets; and the emperor bade Li Po expand his bosom and drink to repletion and without ceremony.

Li Po accordingly drank to his utmost capacity and was soon quite overcome and helpless; and the Son of Heaven ordered the eunuchs to carry him aside and make him comfortable for the night.

* =Khan.

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II

The next morning at the fifth watch, the emperor ascended his throne.

> Now three times crack the warning whips of state,
> In serried ranks th' expectant courtiers wait!

But Li Po had not yet risen from his drunken sleep, so eunuchs were sent to rouse him and bring him into the Presence, and after the emperor had given audience to countless other officials, he summoned Li Po before the throne. He noted, however, that Li's face still bore evidence of his potations and that both his eyes were still somewhat obscured, so a eunuch was despatched to the imperial kitchen with orders that a sour broth of triple strength, made of fish, should be prepared to dispel the fumes of wine. In a trice an attendant came in bearing a bowl of this broth on a golden tray, and the Son of Heaven, seeing that it was still too hot to be swallowed, stirred it round and round with his own imperial ivory chopsticks until it became sufficiently cool to be taken. He then handed it to Hanlin Li, who knelt down and drank it, whereupon he immediately felt entirely restored.

Now the assembled officials, observing that the Son of Heaven behaved in such an unusually gracious manner towards Li Po, were both astonished and pleased; astonished to see that the ordinary rules of etiquette were disregarded, and pleased to think that the emperor had obtained the services of a man on whom he relied. But Yang Kuo-chung and Kao Li-shih were enraged and their faces betrayed their displeasure.

The imperial command then went forth that the barbarian envoy should enter. He forthwith strode in, and, in a voice that would carry between hill-tops, saluted the emperor.

Li Po then, clad in his purple robe and his official hat, and assuming the air of an immortal rising up into the clouds,

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took the barbarian despatch and, standing beneath the throne, read it out in a sonorous voice, not making a single mistake. The barbarian envoy was much astonished at this, and Li, turning to him, said:

"Your insignificant state has been somewhat lacking in respect! But the generosity of the Holy One is as profound as Heaven itself. He disregards your actions and makes no comparisons. His reply, for which you are required to wait, will now be communicated to you!"

Thereupon the barbarian envoy, in a great state of alarm, knelt down before the throne. And the Son of Heaven caused a sevenfold bejewelled seat to be brought and placed at the side of the throne. An ink-slab made of Khoten jade was then brought, together with an ivory pen tipped with rabbit's hair, a cake of ink fragrant with dragon's saliva,* and red paper decorated with gold. Each was placed in its proper position, and Li Po was ordered to draw near and take his seat and compose the despatch.

But the poet first made memorial and said: "The boots of Your Majesty's servant are not clean, and it is to be feared that the imperial carpet will be soiled. May the emperor, of his gracious kindness, permit his servant to remove his boots and change his socks before taking his seat!"

To this the Son of Heaven at once consented, and ordered a young eunuch to remove the boots of Hanlin Li. But Li Po demurred at this.

"Your servant has a special petition to make," he said, "and may it please Your Majesty first to pardon his madness in making it. Your servant will then dare to speak!"

"Say on," replied the Emperor, "and fear no censure, even though you may blunder!"

Li Po then made memorial to the following effect:

"When your servant competed last year in the examinations," he said, "his essay was rejected by Yang, the

* = Ambergris.

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Examiner-in-chief, and your servant was driven forth by Kao, the Chief Eunuch. Now today these two nobles are to be seen in the forefront of the ranks of the officials here assembled, and your servant feels exceedingly downcast at the recollection of his humiliation. He would therefore beg that jade words be spoken in command to Yang Kuo-chung that he may hold your servant's ink-slab and prepare the ink, and to Kao Li-shih that he may remove your servant's boots and change his socks. Then, and then only, will your servant feel at peace, and then only, will he be able to write the despatch for the emperor. No shame, moreover, will be attaching to the Imperial commands!"

And the emperor, when he was about to make use of the services of Li Po in so great a crisis, feared to thwart his whim, so he commanded Yang Kuo-chung to hold the ink-slab and Kao Li-shih to remove the poet's boots. And the two nobles in question bethought themselves of how they had belittled Li Po on the former occasion when they said that such a student as he was only fit to rub ink or remove boots, and seeing how that same man was now the right-hand of the emperor and had received such marked favours from him, they knew why he took this method of requiting them for their former insults. They realized that there was no help for it but to do what they were told, so they made no protest at the emperor's commands. Though they dared to feel anger, yet they did not dare to express it. As it has been written:

"Who blames another proves himself to blame,
He ridicules himself who slights his friend,
But who is wronged should not resent the same,
If so he does, where can the quarrel end?"

Thus Li Po on this occasion proudly obtained his way, and with clean socks he ascended the dais and took his seat on the jewelled stool, Yang Kuo-chung holding the ink-slab at his side and rubbing the ink upon it. And it is not easy

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to imagine how unequal was the rank and position of these two—Li, the lately rejected competitor in the examinations, proudly sitting there; and Yang, the Examiner-in-chief, standing waiting upon him! To such an extent did the Son of Heaven favour him who was to express the imperial commands. And so the Examiner-in-chief, as he held the ink-slab, was not even granted the favour of a seat, but had to remain standing in attendance.

But Li Po with his left hand stroked his beard aside and with his right grasped the rabbit's-hair pen. He applied the pen to the decorated paper and wrote without the slightest hesitation, and in a trice had completed the despatch which was to strike terror into the barbarians. The characters were all most elegantly written and not the slightest mistake was made.

When he had finished, he rose and laid the despatch on the Dragon table. The Son of Heaven looked at the document in amazement, for it was all written in the same script as that of the barbarian despatch, and not one character was recognizable! He gave it over to the scrutiny of the assembled officials and all were equally astonished. The Son of Heaven then bade Li Po read it out, and Li read it out in a clear ringing voice as follows:

"An Order from the Great T'ang Emperor K'ai Yuan (Note 16) to the K'o Tu of P'o Hai:

"It has always been recognized as inadvisable for an egg to come into violent contact with a stone, or for a snake to challenge a dragon to mortal combat!

"Since the heavens opened and the present Emperor began His reign, He has had complete dominion over the four seas and His generals have led His armies victorious into every region. The people of the land of Chieh Li transgressed their treaty and were led into captivity. The P'u Tsan was guilty of deceit and treachery, and was made to swear allegiance. Siam has sent a letter of tribute written on paper embroidered with gold. India has sent a bird able to speak. Persia has sent a snake able to catch rats. Syria

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has sent a dog able to hold a horse. A white parrot came from Ho Ling. A luminous pearl was sent from Lin I. Ku Li Kan has sent Us a famous horse. From Nepaul has been sent some remarkable wine.

"There is no one who does not fear Our might and respect Our virtues. Every nation is ready to purchase peace with Us and pray for freedom from molestation. When Korea was rebellious, We, the Son of Heaven, were compelled to inflict chastisement, and the dynasty that had held sway for nine hundred years was cut off in one day!

"Is this not a proof of the folly of setting Heaven at nought? Is this not a mirror reflecting the consequences of disobedience to a superior? Moreover, the small states beyond the sea, subject to Korea, are as compared to the Middle Kingdom, no bigger than a prefecture; the quantity of their stores and the number of their troops are but one ten-thousandth of Our resources. Your anger is like that of a mantis, and any violent act of yours would be considered as but a lack of due respect. If the troops of Heaven were to descend upon you, the blood of your people would run like a river a thousand *li* long!

"You, Sir, will meet the same fate as that which overtook the land of Chieh Li, and your country will become as Korea!

"But Our holy compassion is as vast as the ocean, and your madness will be pardoned if you are quickly submissive and will attend promptly with your tribute. Do not cause Us to come and wipe you utterly out, thus making you a laughing-stock for the other barbarians!

"Take a careful and prolonged heed of this warning!"

The Emperor on hearing the terms of this despatch was greatly pleased and instructed Li Po to read it over to the barbarian envoy in his own tongue before the imperial seal should be affixed to the document. And Li Po ordered Kao, the Chief Eunuch, to pull his boots on again so that he could descend from the dais and obey the emperor's command. He then read the despatch aloud in a voice that resembled the clashing of cymbals, and the barbarian envoy did not dare to say one word in reply, but his countenance became of the colour of dust. He had of necessity to make obeisance

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Li Po answers the barbarians' despatch

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to the emperor and bid farewell to the court, whereafter he was escorted out of the city by Hanlin Ho.

On his way the envoy asked who it was that had translated his despatch, and on being told that it was Hanlin Li he remarked that he must indeed have been a very great official, seeing that the Examiner-in-chief held his ink-slab and the Chief Eunuch changed his boots.

"The Examiner-in-chief and the Chief Eunuch, though officials of honour and distinction," replied Hanlin Ho, "are after all ordinary men, but Li T'ai-po is a holy immortal from on high sent to advise and assist the court, and there is no one to compare with him!"

The envoy then bowed his head and departed. He made his way back to his own country and reported his experiences to his master, who, on seeing the despatch that he had received in reply, was much alarmed and took council with his advisers.

"The court of T'ang," he said, "has heavenly messengers to assist it; how can we oppose such a people?" And he wrote out a letter of submission, and year by year thereafter sent his tribute duly.

But these are matters which happened subsequently. Let us return to the capital and tell how the Son of Heaven loaded Li Po with honours. He wished to raise him in rank, but Li Po refused.

"I desire no increased dignity," said the poet, "for my only wish is to wander about without any restriction and to come to the assistance of Your Majesty at intervals when I may be wanted, after the manner of Tung Fang-so (Note 17) of the Han dynasty."

"If you will not accept rank," replied the emperor, "We have yellow gold and pure white jade, precious stones and curious gems, which We will bestow upon you if you prefer such things."

"I, Your servant, desire none of these things," said Li Po, "but I should wish to accompany Your Majesty wherever

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You may go, and every day to be allowed to empty two thousand goblets of fine wine!"

And the emperor, recognizing that Li was an entirely disinterested and independent person, from this time forth invariably asked him to the palace banquets, and allowed him always to remain sleeping in the Hall of Golden Bells. He, moreover, consulted him upon all important matters of state, and the poet grew daily in favour.

III

One day it happened that Li Po was riding along in the suburbs of the capital when he heard the sound of drums and gongs approaching, and saw the executioner's men pushing the condemned cart along towards the execution ground. So he stopped his horse and inquired as to the identity of the criminals. He was told that they were military officials who had been unfortunate enough to sustain a defeat at Ping Chou and were to suffer the death penalty in consequence at the east market.

Li noticed that one of the condemned men was a very handsome fellow, tall and strong. He asked his name and the officer replied in a voice that boomed like a vast bell that he was called Kuo Tzu-i. And the poet, seeing that the man presented a most unusual appearance and looked as if he might at some future time become a pillar of support to the state, ordered the chief executioner to delay the carrying out of the sentence until the emperor had been communicated with.

Now everyone knew Hanlin Li as the man for whom the emperor had stirred the broth with his own hands, so no opposition was made to his orders. Li Po at once turned his horse and rode up to the palace gate, where he knocked and demanded an immediate audience with his majesty. He asked for, and was immediately granted, a reprieve for

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Kuo Tzu-i, and riding back forthwith to the execution ground he opened and read the imperial missive.

The cart was thereupon unlocked and Kuo Tzu-i was at once set free to expiate his crime with virtuous acts. The happy man knelt down and ko-towed to Li Po to thank him for his favour in saving his life, vowing to repay his debt of gratitude which he could never forget.

IV

Now it happened that, at this period, peonies (Note 18) became very popular at the court. These flowers were transported from Yang Chow and were of four varieties, deep red, deep purple, light red and pure white. The emperor had them planted in front of the Pavilion of Heavy Fragrance for the delectation of his favourite, the lady Yang Kuei Fei, and a troop of minstrels were summoned to make music suitable to the occasion.

"You and I, my lady," said the emperor, "are now enjoying the spectacle of these wonderful flowers, and with new flowers should we not have a new song?"; and so saying, he ordered the leader of the singers, Li Kuei-nien by name, to call Li Po into the palace. But it was reported that Hanlin Li was in a wine-shop in the suburbs of the city, so Li Kuei-nien set off at once for the place, and when he arrived there he heard a man singing in the upper storey of a certain wine-shop, and these were the words of the song which he heard:

> "I quaff three cups; the Way is plain before me,
> Two goblets more; a perfect bliss is mine.
> But let no babbler in his sober moments
> Divulge the joyful ecstasy of wine!"

Li Kuei-nien knew at once that this must be Li Po that he heard singing, so he dashed upstairs with great strides. And there he saw the poet sitting by himself at a small table

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and drinking to a sprig of double peach blossom, which was set in a vase before him. In his hand he held a great goblet, which he grasped as though he were loth to relinquish it, but Li Kuei-nien went up to him and informed him that the Holy Master desired his presence immediately at the Pavilion of Heavy Fragrance. And the other drinkers, hearing the emperor's order thus given, all rose from their seats in astonishment to look, but Li Po took no notice at all except to open his eyes for a moment while he quoted to Li Kuei-nien a well-known line from the poet Tao-yüan:

"I am drunk and wish to slumber; kind sir, please depart!"

But Li Kuei-nien was a man of no small determination, so calling down below through the window, he ordered seven or eight of his men to come up to him. This they very soon did, and, crowding round Li Po, they soon had him carried down and set astride his horse, "Jade Flower," where they propped him up on all sides, while Li Kuei-nien urged on the steed from behind. Thus they went straightway to the Hall of the Five Phoenixes, where they found that the Son of Heaven had sent attendants to meet them and give permission for Li Po to ride right through into the palace, so that Li Kuei-nien had no need to help the poet to alight from his horse. So, palace attendants and all supporting him, he rode straight through into the inner precincts as far as the Lake of Joyful Prosperity. They stopped at the Pavilion of Heavy Fragrance and the Son of Heaven then beheld Li sitting there on his horse with his eyes tight shut, not yet having returned to consciousness. So His Majesty ordered the eunuchs to spread out a purple mat in front of the pavilion and to help the poet down from his horse and to allow him to sleep a little longer. The emperor then watched him until he should awake. But, seeing that Li was dribbling slightly from the mouth, the Son of Heaven used his Dragon sleeve and wiped the poet's lips.

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"I have heard that cold water applied to the face," said the lady Kuei Fei, "is calculated to arouse from sleep; an attendant could well be ordered to get some water for this purpose from the lake!"

So, at the emperor's command, a lady of the palace filled her mouth with lake water and gently sprayed the poet's face, whereat Li Po started up from his torpor. Then seeing the emperor before his eyes he was much alarmed and kneeled before him.

"Your servant deserves a myriad deaths!" he said. "But I am a drunken immortal and I crave forgiveness!"

The Son of Heaven took his hand and raised him up.

"To-day We have come, together with this lady," he said, "to gaze upon these wonderful flowers, and We desire a new ode to celebrate the occasion, so We have sent for you. Compose now three verses to the air called 'Even and Clear.'"

Li Kuei-nien then gave the poet some paper emblazoned with gold, and Li Po, though still quite drunk, wrote out the three following verses without the slightest hesitation:

The clouds at sunset are her garb, the petals' bloom her hue,
The balmy breeze of spring blows soft, replete with fragrant dew;
Such beauties rare in terraces of gems should be arrayed,
Lit up by silver moonbeams in the glittering hills of jade!

The fulness of her beauty crowns this flower from heaven above,
Not hers the torture of that nymph who vainly longed for love (Note 19),
No damsel from the court of Han could vie with charms so rare,
'Twas her attire in those old days that made Fei Yen so fair!

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The flowers reflect the beauty of her State-destroying
charms (Note 20),
The Lord of All is near with smiling face and loving arms,
The restlessness that spring-time brings gives way to tranquil ease
As from the Fragrant Hall are scanned these wondrous
peonies.

And when the Son of Heaven read these verses his delight knew no bounds.

"Such heaven-born talent," he declared, "would surely put to shame the whole Hanlin Academy!" And he ordered Li Kuei-nien to make his minstrels sing the verses; the musicians immediately struck up the tune and the emperor himself joined in on a flute of jade.

When the song was finished, the lady Kuei Fei, holding her kerchief gracefully in both hands, thanked the emperor repeatedly for the entertainment, but the Son of Heaven told her to thank Li Po and not himself. So Kuei Fei took a seven-times bejewelled goblet and with her own hands filled it with wine made of the western grape, and handed it to an attendant to give to Li Po.

And the emperor gave Li authority to wander wherever he pleased in the palace gardens and gave orders that an attendant should always follow him with rare wine of which he could drink to his heart's content whenever he liked. And, furthermore, Li was always invited to all the palace banquets, and everyone in the court, including Kuei Fei, became filled with admiration and respect for him.

The Chief Eunuch alone, who had by no means forgotten the time when he had been made to remove the poet's boots, hated him fiercely but was compelled to accept the situation. One day, however, when Kuei Fei was singing over to herself the poem which has just been quoted and sighing with admiration at its excellence, the Chief Eunuch spied her and,

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after satisfying himself that there was no one else within earshot, went up to the lady.

"When you, Madam, first heard this poem of Li Po's," he said, "your slave's impression was that you would be consumed with fury against the author! How is it that you are, on the contrary, so fond of him?"

"And what reason is there," she asked, "why I should be angry with him?"

"Because of that allusion to Fei Yen, without a doubt" replied the eunuch. "Fei Yen, you must know, was a person of the name of Chao, who in the Western Han dynasty became the consort of the emperor. She it is that one sees in these days portrayed in the pictures that are so common and represent a warrior holding up a golden dish on which there stands a damsel posturing with her arms. For Fei Yen was extraordinarily slimly built, and was so wonderfully light of foot that when she walked it was like a single flower being gently carried along.

"The emperor Ch'eng Ti was passionately devoted to her and it was never for a moment suspected that she would have been guilty of an intrigue. And yet she did do this with a young man named Yen Ch'un-feng, who used to conceal himself within the hollow of the wall of her apartments. And one day when the emperor was paying a visit to his favourite, he heard this man cough in the hollow wall. He at once caused him to be dislodged and brought out, and had him decapitated on the spot. His intention was also to depose Fei Yen from her position as consort, but he pardoned her on the earnest representations of her sister Ho Te. But he never afterwards entered her apartments.

"This Li Po, in his poem, obviously intends to compare you to Fei Yen merely as a means of insulting you. Can you, Madam, fail to see this, if you reflect a little?"

Now it should be stated that some time before this, Kuei Fei had caused a certain young Mongol, named An Lu-shan,

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to be near her person, ostensibly as her adopted son, and at this time she was herself actually engaged in an intrigue with him. And the whole court knew of it with the single exception of the emperor himself. So when the eunuch told her the story of Fei Yen, she was cut to the heart and ever afterwards hated Li Po fiercely. She began to disparage him to the emperor for his wildness and proneness to liquor, saying that he was too lacking in propriety to serve as a minister. And the emperor, seeing that his favourite had taken a dislike to Li Po, ceased asking him to palace banquets and no longer allowed him to sleep on the imperial precincts.

Li Po guessed that he was being made the victim of the Chief Eunuch's animosity and that the emperor himself was being estranged from him, so he repeatedly petitioned to be allowed to resign and leave the court, but this the Son of Heaven would by no means at first allow. So Li proceeded to make himself altogether useless through excessive potations, and together with seven others he formed a society for drinking wine, and they went by the name of "The Eight Immortals of the Wine Cup."

But, nevertheless, the emperor continued to be warmly attached to Li in spite of the fact that his unpopularity elsewhere in the palace caused a certain estrangement. So seeing that Li continued in his desire to be allowed to withdraw from the court, he at last summoned the poet.

"Your laudable (Note 21) intention to retire into seclusion," he said, "is noted, and you have Our permission temporarily to withdraw yourself from Our presence. Come and have audience with Us again in a few days, and if you have any parting request to make, so that you will not return empty-handed to your mountains, it will be granted to you, whatsoever you may ask!"

"I need nothing," replied Li Po, "except a few strings of cash to tie to the handle of my staff, sufficient to purchase

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my daily allowance of wine. If I have that, I shall want for nothing!"

But when he came to have his final audience, the Emperor gave him a little plaque of gold, on which he inscribed with his own imperial hands the following words:

"This is Li Po, the Care-free; the most famous scholar in the world!
Let every drinking-shop give him wine!
Let every public treasury give him money—a prefecture one thousand strings of cash, a magistracy five hundred strings of cash!
Let every official, and each private individual, civil or military, pay him due respect!
A lack of deference to him will be considered as a breach of The Emperor's commands!"

The emperor also gave him a thousand taels of yellow gold, an embroidered coat, a jade belt, a gilded saddle, a horse as magnificent as a dragon, and a retinue of twenty men.

So Li Po ko-towed in thanks and farewell, and, as he departed, the emperor also handed him a pair of golden favours to wear in his hat, and three goblets full of imperial wine, and permitted him to mount his horse in front of the palace.

And a hundred officials, each bearing wine, escorted him through the suburbs, and they ceased not to drink with him all the way to the 10-*li* pavilion. Only Yang, the Examiner-in-chief, and Kao, the Head Eunuch, who hated him, did not see him off. And his seven drinking companions and many other officials accompanied him for a hundred *li*, and there stayed with him for three days before returning.

In the collected works of Li Po there is a poem entitled "Parting with my Friends of the Golden Gate," which was written at this time and runs as follows:

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"The Phoenix Order humbly I obeyed,
Leaving at once my misty mountain home;
Aside to-day my duties I have laid
And now depart in distant lands to roam.

And ever, as I face the setting sun,
My friendships in my songs will be expressed;
In simple verse I thank you, every one,
Ere I begin to-night my lonely quest!"

Li Po, then clad in his official robes and wearing his hat of gauze, mounted his horse and rode away.

V

On his travels, whenever the poet was asked who he was, he always styled himself "The Officer in the Embroidered Coat." Whenever he encountered a wine-shop, he went in and drank; whenever he came to a city where there was an imperial treasury he obtained money.

Thus after many days of travel he arrived at his home in Chin Chou and again met his wife, Hsü Shih. And the Prefect of Chin Chou and all the other local officials, hearing that he had returned home, came to pay their respects to him and he was drunk every day. And the days and months sped by until half-a-year had passed.

One day Li Po told his wife that the wander-fever was upon him again and that he must set forth once more upon his travels over the countryside. So, donning the attire of a young student, and with the tablet that the emperor had given him hidden upon his person, he mounted a stalwart ass and started again on his wanderings, accompanied by a young attendant and trusting to his tablet to procure for him wine and money from the officials whom he might encounter.

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In due course he arrived at a town called Hua Yin, where he heard that the magistrate of that district was a very avaricious man and was oppressing the people by his extortions. Li Po formed a resolution to cure him of his evil ways, so he dismissed his attendant, and, mounting his ass facing the tail, he rode slowly up and down in front of the magistrate's yamen. The latter was sitting in his court hearing the cases that were brought before him, and, looking up, he beheld Li Po performing his antics outside.

"Monstrous!" he cried. "Monstrous! How dare anyone make game of the Guardian of the People in this fashion!" And he ordered his runners to arrest Li Po and bring him before the court. But the poet pretended to be drunk and made no reply when he was questioned, so the magistrate told the gaoler to lock him up in a cell until such time as he should become sober again and could make a fitting statement in defence of his conduct upon his examination on the following day. Li Po was accordingly cast into prison, where the gaoler came to see him.

But Li Po, sweeping aside his beard, laughed long and loudly at him.

"Evidently," said the gaoler, "this person is demented!"

"No," replied the poet, "I am neither a lunatic nor am I even temporarily deranged!"

"Well, if you are not," said the gaoler, "you had better make some statement in your defence! Who are you, and for what reason do you come riding here upon an ass to make a mock of the magistrate?"

"If you wish me to make a statement," answered Li Po, "you must provide me with pen and paper." And when these were provided and placed upon a table, Li Po pushed the gaoler aside and bade him stand back until he had finished writing. The other was much diverted at this and waited with curiosity to see what sort of a document this madman would produce. Li Po then wrote out his statement, which was to the following effect:

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"This is the deposition of a man from Chin Chou named Li Po.

At an early age I had a wide knowledge of letters; with a few strokes of my pen I was able to make both devils and immortals shed tears of emotion!

I was one of the Eight Genii of Ch'ang An; I was one of the Six Hermits of Chu Hsi!

It was I who wrote the despatch which put to flight the barbarians. My reputation is known far and wide.

The Jade Chariot has often borne me as a companion to the Son of Heaven.

The Imperial Chopsticks have stirred my broth; my mouth has been wiped by the Imperial Sleeve.

Chief Eunuch Kao has removed my boots; Yang, the Examiner-in-chief, has been my ink-slab bearer.

The Son of Heaven has granted me permission to come mounted to the palace gate.

This is the man who is not permitted to ride an ass in the presence of the Magistrate of Hua Yin Hsien!!

And if anyone wishes proof of my antecedents, let him give good heed to my Golden Tablet!"

Having finished writing this declaration, Li Po gave it to the gaoler to read. The man was frightened out of his senses when he beheld it, and, throwing himself on the ground, he ko-towed humbly to the poet.

"Oh, most learned and honourable sir!" he cried. "Have pity on your servant, who was indeed only carrying out the orders of his superiors and had no intention to offend! I implore your pardon ten thousand times, and I trust to your magnanimity (which is as vast as the ocean) to overlook my crime!"

"You are not indeed to blame in this matter," replied Li Po. "But go up and tell the magistrate that I am coming to see him, bearing an edict of His Imperial Majesty, written on a golden tablet, and that I should be interested to know for what crime I have been arrested!"

The gaoler expressed his thanks with another ko-tow and then hastened up to the magistrate bearing the poet's deposi-

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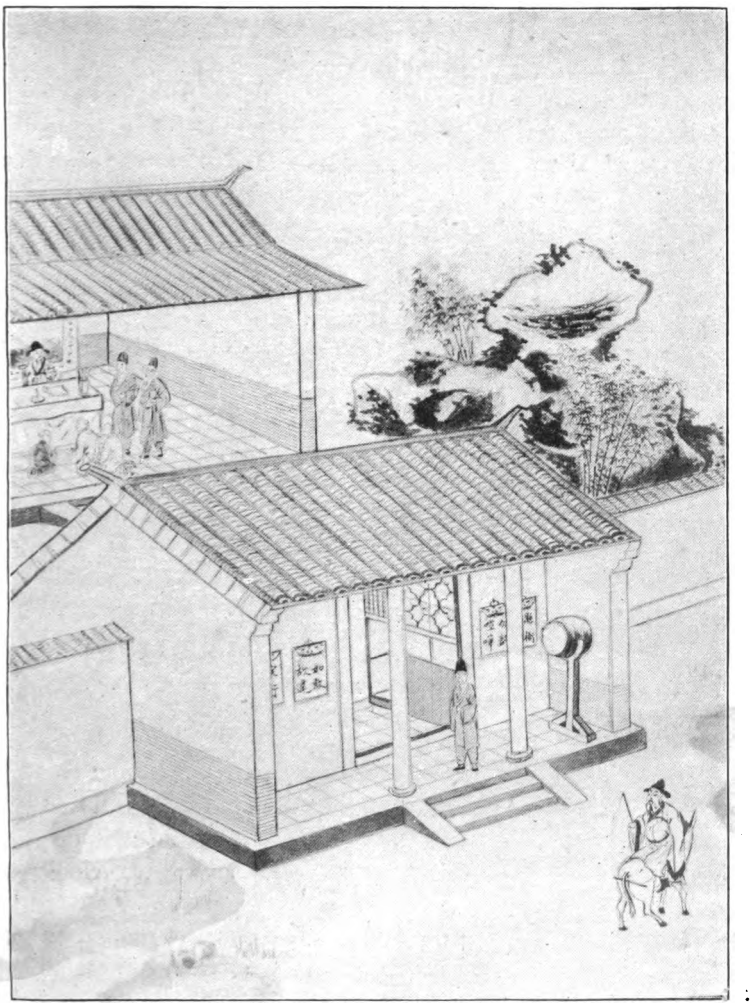

"He rode slowly in front of the Magistrate's Yamen"

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tion, nor did he omit to mention the golden tablet. And when the magistrate learned the truth, he became as a child who hears thunder for the first time and has no place to hide himself. He hastened down with the gaoler into the prison, and, ko-towing in the anguish of his remorse, he cried: "This humble official, though indeed in possession of his eyesight, failed to recognize the Sacred Mountain! I have been most careless and disrespectful and I humbly beg your forgiveness!"

And the other local officials, when they heard of these doings, also came to pay their deference to Li Po, who, at general request, took his seat in the great hall of the yamen. When all assembled before him had bowed themselves to the ground, he took out his golden tablet and read out to them the inscription which it bore.

"'. . . Let every official and each private individual, civil or military,'" he repeated, "'pay him due respect! A lack of deference to him will be considered as a breach of The Emperor's commands!' Thus says the tablet! What, then, is the crime of you officials here assembled?"

The assembled officials, seeing and hearing the emperor's order, one and all fell down and ko-towed again.

"Not one of us," they said, "but deserves ten thousand deaths!" and Li Po, seeing that they all appeared contrite, smiled and addressed them again.

"All of you," he said, "are in receipt of rank and official salaries from the state. How can you then dare to oppress and extort money from the people as you are doing? If you turn from your past iniquities in this respect, then your present crime will be forgiven you!"

While these words were being spoken, all listened in the prescribed attitude of silent and reverential attention, and all respectfully vowed that they would not venture to offend again. And they invited Li Po to a state banquet in the great hall, where they drank for three days before they dispersed. And the magistrate cleansed his heart and readjusted

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his methods, becoming thereafter an exemplary official.

The news of these events spread far and wide, and it was rumoured abroad that Li Po had been sent on a mission of secret inspection by the emperor to see how the administration of public affairs was being conducted. So there was not one avaricious official but changed his methods, and virtue replaced oppression in every district.

VI

Li Po after this set forth again on his wanderings and visited the districts in the south and west, inspecting the scenery in every place. And his devotion to wine and poetry remained undiminished.

It was about this time that the rebellion led by An Lu-shan took place, and the emperor in consequence led an expedition into Szechuen (Note 22), where Yang Kuo-chung was slain at the bidding of the soldiery and the lady Kuei Fei was compelled to commit suicide in a temple. From these disturbances Li Po took refuge in the mountains of the south.

And it happened that Lin the Prince of Yung was then generalissimo of the armies of the south-east, and he also was scheming to make himself emperor, hoping to profit by the troubled times. And hearing that Li Po was a man of wonderful talent, he compelled him to come out of the mountains, wishing to give him spurious rank. Li Po refused this but was forced to serve as a secretary.

Shortly after this, Su Tsung became emperor at Lin Wu, and Kuo Tzu-i was made commander-in-chief of what was named the Holy Army. He retook the two capitals Ch'ang An and Lo Yang, that had been captured, and then received information that Lin the Prince of Yung was on the point of active rebellion. Kuo was therefore sent to lead his army against the rebels, and Lin was defeated.

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Li Po was thus able to effect his escape and fled to Kiukiang, where he was captured by a military outpost on the Great River and detained as a rebel. He was sent under escort to the camp of the commander-in-chief, and when Kuo saw who his captive was, he told the guards to stand back. He then removed Li's bonds with his own hands, and, placing the poet in the seat of honour, he ko-towed before him.

"If it had not been for your clemency in saving my life long ago in the suburbs of Ch'ang An," he said, "I should not to-day be where I am!" And he ordered wine to be brought to soothe the poet's feelings.

The next night was spent in composing a despatch to the emperor to explain how Li Po came to be in the rebel camp. Kuo Tzu-i dwelt on the merit that Li had acquired in frightening away the barbarian army with his famous despatch, and pointed out that the greatest use could be made of his talents. Thus was his debt of gratitude repaid; for, as it has been well said:

"Even in places most remote, old friends rejoined may be;
As leaves float down the swollen streams to meet in the rolling sea!"

By this time, Yang Kuo-chung was already executed and Kao Li-shih sent away in banishment. The former emperor Hsüan Tsung had been rescued from Szechuen and, on his abdication, had been given the title of T'ai Shang Huang. He told his son, the Emperor Su Tsung, of Li Po's remarkable abilities and so the emperor wished to make the poet his Chief Councillor. But Li, reflecting that those who are sunk in the vortex of political life can hardly wander about the country as the fancy takes them, refused this honour, and then, taking leave of Kuo Tzu-i, set forth in a boat for Yochow on the T'ung-t'ing lake. Thence he travelled on farther and after passing Nanking he anchored his junk at

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the Ts'ai Shih river. And there, one night when the moon shone so brightly that the night was turned to day, as Li sat drinking in his boat, he suddenly heard celestial music sounding loud and clear. It came closer and closer to the boat although the sailors did not at first hear it. But suddenly a wind seemed to raise a great wave of water, out of which there rose a huge whale with bristling fins; and two supernatural attendants, holding magic wands in their hands, appeared and addressed Li Po.

"The God of Heaven has sent us," they said, "to meet the Master of the Stars and conduct him back to his realm!"

The boatmen who had heard and seen these portents had fallen prostrate with terror, but after a little while they rose up and watched Li Po seat himself astride of the great whale, which, preceded by the celestial music, rose up out of the water and disappeared into the void (Note 23). Next day they reported these events to the magistrate of the nearest town, who in turn memorialized the Son of Heaven on the matter. And the emperor had a temple built on the hill at Ts'ai Shih and dedicated it to Li Po, giving orders for sacrifices to be performed there during the spring and autumn of each year.

VII

Many years afterwards, during the prosperous days of the T'ai P'ing period of the Sung Dynasty, a certain scholar was crossing the ferry at Ts'ai Shih by night, when he perceived a boat with a silken sail approaching him from the west, and at its mast-head was a white tablet which bore the legend, "Master of Poetry." So the scholar called out:

"Who is this 'Master-poet' that down the stream doth float?
I would request that of his verse a sample he will quote!"

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and from the boat with the silken sail came back the immediate reply:

"It would be rash such poems as mine to quote on such a night,
Lest, wonderstruck, the stars should fall and quench their guiding light!"

The young man was much alarmed, but nevertheless desired to go on board the other boat to see what this should mean. But the boat with the silken sail turned off and anchored under the hill at Ts'ai Shih, and a man in purple robes and an official hat was seen to float off like a ghost and go up to the Li Po temple. The scholar followed him, but when he reached the temple he found no trace of anybody; and then he knew that the person who had capped his verse was none other than Li Po himself.

. . . . . .

Li Po was the most famous drinker and the finest poet that the world has ever seen!

His wondrous talents did he use to abash the savage bands,
The broth that cooled his fevered brow was stirred by sacred hands,
At last, astride a mighty whale, he sought repose on high,
And hard by the river a temple stands to his holy memory.

NOTES

Note 13.—The Emperor Hsüan Tsung or Yuan Tsung (also called Ming Huang, or the Bright Emperor) reigned from A.D. 713 to 756. He was specially remarkable for the interest that he took in art, literature and music, and for the excesses in licentious entertainment that he permitted at his court.

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Note 14.—*Wine:* Except for recent experimental growings, wine proper has not existed in China for many years, and the only alcoholic beverages in general use are those distilled from rice or other grain. Grape wine, however, was formerly in common use, as in evident from the present story.

Drunkenness is now most uncommon in China, but when it does occur—as at a private dinner party—not the slightest stigma attaches to it, and a guest will excuse himself from taking more wine on the plea that he is already drunk.

Note 15.—P'o Hai was a small Mongol kingdom which arose at the beginning of the eighth century and lasted until about A.D. 900, when it was absorbed by the Kitan Tartars.

It was situated north of Korea between the Sungari River and the sea, its capital being the present city of Kirin. P'o Hai was continually on bad terms with the T'ang emperors, who tried to reduce it to vassalage but were met by an obstinate resistance, the people of P'o Hai being aided by Korean refugee soldiers and also by the Japanese.

With Japan, P'o Hai was always on friendly terms, and the correspondence of the envoys from P'o Hai to the Mikado's court is said to be still in existence in Japan. (*Vide* "Corea," by W. E. Griffis.)

This raises an interesting question (on the supposition that this incident has any historical foundation) as to the script in which the despatch was written. It is not likely that P'o Hai had any script of its own, and neither Mongol nor Manchu writing was at that time in existence. The Japanese phonetic script (*Katakana*), on the other hand, was invented about this time, and if this was the script used, as seems possible, it may be that by "K'o Tu," "Mikado," or king, is meant. This gives food for further speculation as to whether the poet Li Po ever included Japan in his wanderings.

I have not been able to identify some of the other countries whose names are mentioned in this and the following despatch, or to suggest any equivalent for the titles of their rulers. Note, however, K'o-han, meaning Khan.

Note 16.—The title of the first part of this emperor's reign (713 to 742) was K'ai Yuan. That of the second portion (742 to 756) was T'ien Pao.

Note 17.—Li Po was here doubtless thinking of a pleasant episode in the life of Tung Fang-so. The latter, being on excellent terms with his emperor, went into the royal apartments one day and drank off the contents of a bottle labelled "Elixir of Life," which had been presented to His Majesty. The emperor in a rage ordered Tung Fang-so to be put to death, but the latter escaped this fate by pointing out that if the elixir were genuine it would be difficult to carry out the sentence, whereas if the elixir were not genuine, no offence had been committed!

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Note 18.—Peonies were banished from the imperial palace by the infamous Empress Wu Hou, who usurped the reins of government some thirty years before. Her ideas of self-glorification were so inflated that she attempted to identify herself with the Supreme Being and, as such, ordered the opening and closing of the flowers that grew in the palace grounds. The peonies, however, showed no signs of obeying her orders and were in consequence punished by being uprooted. The incident is told at length in the "Ching Hua Yuan," another famous Chinese novel.

Note 19.—"The nymph who vainly longed for love": an allusion to a certain dream damsel, who, having encountered Huai, the ruler of the Ch'u State, on one occasion, never afterwards met him again.

Note 20.—"State-destroying charms": an allusion to Li Fu-jen, a famous beauty of the Han Dynasty, of whom it was written the "one glance from her would destroy a city; two glances, a state."

Note 21.—"Laudable intention to retire": It is significant that, in China, refusal to hold office is still looked upon as praiseworthy.

Note 22.—A characteristically euphemistic phrase. The emperor, threatened by rebellion, escaped to Szechuen with difficulty.

Note 23.—The usually accepted version of the poet's demise is less romantic, for he is generally believed to have been drowned by falling out of a boat in a drunken attempt to embrace the reflection of the moon in the water.

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THE WONDERFUL ADVENTURE OF LI, DUKE OF CH'IEN

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THE WONDERFUL ADVENTURE OF LI, DUKE OF CH'IEN

I

In the days of the T'ang Dynasty, during the T'ien Pao period of the reign of the Emperor Yüan Tsung (Note 24), there resided at Ch'ang An a student named Fang Te. He had a square face and large ears (Note 25), and he was a tall upstanding fellow of about thirty years of age, but he lived in desperate poverty and not only constantly lacked sufficient food, but in addition was without any means of earning a livelihood. He relied, indeed, entirely upon his wife, Pei Shih, who was able to keep them both alive by spinning cotton and weaving it into cloth for sale.

At the time our story opens it was the season of late autumn, and Fang Te was wearing his only garments—an old torn cap, and a tattered summer robe, so ragged and ripped that it looked more like a rain-coat of dried grass than anything else. And he realized that the weather would gradually become colder and colder, and thought how embarrassed he would feel if he should meet, while thus clad, anyone who knew him; but he recollected that his wife had at home two pieces of cloth which she had not yet sold, so he determined to try and coax them out of her in order that he might have some new clothes made for himself.

But, strange to say, his wife had come of an insignificant family and her spirit of generosity was reduced to a minimum. She was furnished with heart and bowels of a wolf-like virulence and cruelty, and furthermore she had a wonderful power of caustic repartee, for her tongue was

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sharper than a knife. When she was spoken to she would snap back an answer, good for good or bad for bad; she would talk a dead man to life or a live man into his grave, and she had a reason ready to justify all she said!

And she used to comment ironically upon the fact that her husband had no employment but relied entirely upon her efforts for his daily rice, earning nothing himself. And Fang Te, by reason of the fact that he had not yet met with his good fortune (Note 26), had no reply to make in justification of his case; so he gave way to his wife on every occasion and thus by degrees grew to stand in considerable awe of her.

On this particular day, Pei Shih happened to be thinking of how dependent her husband was upon her, and longing for better days; and she regretted bitterly that her father and mother had allowed her to marry such a man, thus spoiling her whole life. And she became altogether resentful and angry. As ill-luck would have it, it was just that moment that her husband chose to make his request for the two pieces of cloth.

"That is just like you," she burst forth at him, "you great lazy lout! You make not the least effort to earn the price of a grain of rice and you depend entirely on a woman for what you eat! And now you want the clothes off my back! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

And Fang Te, being thus scolded without a word to say in his defence, blushed in very shame, and, in default of a better reply, he muttered despondently: "Yes, wife, I have indeed been dependent upon you in the past, and am truly very grateful to you. But though I am now in a somewhat desperate plight, my luck is sure to turn some day. Do, I beg of you, lend me this cloth, and later on when I can make a career for myself I will repay your generosity in the most lavish fashion!"

But Pei Shih waved him aside contemptuously. "The

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very idea of a man of your age talking like that!" she said. "A fine career you will make, forsooth! If your good luck does not fall into your lap from Heaven, you will never get anything except what you can steal! You have cheated me with fair words for many years and I trust you not at all. Those two pieces of cloth, I tell you, are going to be made into clothes for me against the winter! So do not think that you will get them!"

Thus the unfortunate Fang Te not only failed to obtain possession of the cloth, but, to boot, had to endure abuse and shame. He was half of a mind to give his wife a beating, but he feared her tongue and her loud voice, for he had no desire that his neighbours should think, from the noise that she would make, that he was being bullied by her. So he swallowed his wrath in silence and hastened out of the house. He hoped to find, as a last resource, some friend from whom he could borrow money, but after walking about for a long time he met no one. That day the weather also was against him, for soon it came on to rain and to blow hard, and his old tattered clothes fluttered round him, making a sound like the wind among the dry leaves in autumn. His whole body came out all over "goose-flesh," and, bending down to lessen the effect of the storm, he ran on to take shelter in an old temple which was hard by, known as the Temple of Beautiful Clouds.

He looked round as he stepped over the door-sill of the temple, and saw, sitting on the railing along one side of the courtyard within, a big strong-looking man, and, in the main building an old priest chanting the sutras.

Fang Te went across the courtyard to the railing opposite that occupied by the tall stranger, and sat down and looked blankly at the sky. The rain gradually ceased and he was just thinking of going out again and wondering whether another shower could be coming on, when he happened to turn half round and there on the wall behind him was the drawing of a bird. Its feathers, wings, and tail were all

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carefully drawn and it lacked nothing except a head, which had been omitted.

Now there are many foolish people in the world who will not take any trouble at all to provide for their own needs, but who are always roused to interest by things that do not concern them in the least! Fang Te was just such a man; and he thought to himself: "I have often heard it said that in drawing a bird one should draw the head first. The draughtsman in this case evidently did not agree with that, for he has left the head out altogether! I wonder what he did that for!"

And then he looked and thought, and thought and looked again, and he said to himself, "This bird is really drawn quite well. I have never learned to draw but I do not think that it would be very difficult to complete this drawing by adding the head! I will just step across and borrow a brush and an ink-slab from the priest, and see what I can do!"

No sooner said than done; and the head that he drew was quite creditably put in. In fact Fang Te was well pleased with his work. "If I had only taken lessons," he said to himself, "I might have become a fine artist!"

Just at this moment, the tall man, who had been sitting opposite to him, came over to his side of the courtyard, and, walking up to Fang Te, looked him up and down carefully and then, his face suddenly suffused with smiles, he asked if he might have a word with him.

"Who are you, sir, and what do you want?" asked Fang Te.

"You need not ask questions, sir," the man replied. "But you will find it to your advantage to follow me!"

Now Fang Te, as has been shown, was in the throes of poverty and distress, and he brightened up very much when he head the word "advantage," so he hastily returned the brush and the ink-slab to the priest, and, adjusting his tattered garments as best he could, he followed the tall man

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out. By this time, though the storm was over, it was very muddy under foot, but Fang Te hardly noticed that, and the pair of them left the temple and, passing by the Sheng Ping gate of the city, drew near to the Park of Joyful Wandering, a most lonely neighbourhood. The tall stranger stopped before a small side door hard by and knocked three times on it. A moment afterwards a man opened the door and came out to them, and he also was a tall strong fellow; and when he saw Fang Te he likewise looked very pleased and welcomed him in.

Fang Te felt rather nervous and wondered who these two big men might be and what could be the advantage that might accrue to him from his going in with them. However, he only asked whose house that was and received in reply the intimation that he would soon find out when he entered. So he stepped over the door-sill and the two men barred the door behind him and led him inside. Fang Te looked around him as they walked and saw a courtyard overgrown with a rough thorny scrub and many years' growth of grass, like a long-neglected garden, and, after walking round innumerable corners and across many other courtyards, they came to a half-ruined pavilion, out of which came to meet them some twelve or fifteen big rough-looking men, every one of whom was extraordinarily tall and had huge arms and a fierce countenance.

But they all smiled a welcome to Fang Te and asked him to enter. He was really rather alarmed, as he wondered to himself what business such a strange-looking gang of men could possibly have with him. However, they conducted him into the pavilion, and when they had all greeted him they asked him to take a seat on a bench. They then asked him his name and he told them, asking in turn what they might have to say to him.

"I will now tell you the truth," said the man who had been his conductor. "We are a roving band of brave brothers, who, working by lake and river, make a speciality of a

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business that requires no capital but merely entails courage from every one!

"A short while ago we very nearly got into considerable difficulties in this business, so we all prayed to heaven to send us a gifted and resourceful man whom we could appoint as our chief to lead us in our enterprise. We therefore set upon the wall of the Temple of Beautiful Clouds an unfinished drawing of a bird, and, praying to Heaven to help us, we swore that just as feathers and wings were all complete in the drawing—all in fact except the head—we would take for our head the brave fellow that Heaven should send to complete the drawing of the bird on the wall!

"We waited many days, and such a man did not come. But at last Heaven gave an answer to our prayer, and to-day we have encountered you, sir, who, if appearances are to be trusted, are brave, strong, and clever, in fact the ideal master of our stronghold!

"We are all now completely at your orders, and you will be so kind as to ensure that we shall be able to ply our calling without getting into difficulties any more! Is not this an excellent proposal?" Then, turning to the rest, the man bade them go and slaughter two beasts as a sacrifice to heaven and earth.

Several of the others at once ran off to the back premises, while Fang Te, in great trepidation, thought over the proposal that had been made to him. "Here have I fallen into the hands of a gang of desperate robbers," he thought. "I, who have always lived a blameless life! How can I possibly engage in such a calling as this!" So he turned to the men and addressed them as follows: "Respected sirs, brave men all!" he said, "I should be exceedingly glad to help you in any other matter within my competence, but in this affair I really hardly see my way to obey your instructions!"

"And why?" they asked.

"For the reason," replied Fang Te, "that I am naturally a scholar and am now engaged in waiting for my good

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fortune to mature. How can I possibly adopt so lawless a profession as yours?"

"You are certainly wrong, sir," said the others. "The Prime Minister at present is Yang Kuo-chung, who sells offices and rank to the highest bidder. If one has money, one can rise to be a high official, but not otherwise! The only man who has risen without the aid of money is Li Tai-po, whose talent was really extraordinary, and even he has suffered persecution at Yang's hands and could not go very far. Moreover, if he had not been able to read the despatch of the barbarians, he would up to this moment still be a white-robed scholar (Note 27) like yourself. We would be most unwilling, sir, to cause you any offence, but by your present appearance you are not a moneyed man; how can you then expect to obtain any office?

"You had much better throw in your lot with us—wine in great cups, meat in mighty joints, splendid clothes to wear, silver in such quantities that it must be weighed out when we share our gains! All these are ours! And you are asked to be the master of it all! What a noble time you will have! And, if after a while the business increases sufficiently, we will build a stockade among the mountains; and should you have any fancy for the title of King, it will indeed be yours for the asking!"

This speech made Fang Te draw in his breath with perplexity and fear, and he made no reply.

"If you absolutely refuse to join us," the men went on, "we will, of course, not venture to use any compulsion. But at the same time you are here now, and I fear that it will not be very easy to get away, and should you persist in your determination it may well be that some accident will happen to you for which we shall not be able to hold ourselves responsible!" And, as he said this, each man drew out a long sword with a hissing sound which frightened poor Fang Te very considerably. He rose from his seat and retired a few paces as he replied, "I beg of you, gentlemen,

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not to begin your protest yet! Please let us discuss this matter a little further!"

"No!" was the reply. "Answer at once! Yes or no! There is no need for further discussion!"

And Fang Te reflected that it was a very lonely spot in which he then was and that if he did not agree he would only be losing his life without getting anything in return, whereas, if he pretended to agree, it might be that on the next day he could find a way of escape so that he could lay an information against the gang. His mind was soon made up, and he replied:

"I am really very grateful, gentlemen, for your generous and amiable offer. But you should remember that I am by nature very timid, and I am afraid lest the position that you have kindly proposed that I should fill may be beyond my capacity!"

"That is no great matter," was the reply. "Everyone is timid at first, but after a little experience you will feel as bold as the best of us."

"If that is indeed so," responded Fang Te, "I must say that I am constrained to accept your offer!" On hearing which, the others expressed themselves highly satisfied, and all quietly replaced their swords.

"Well, then," they said, "we are now all members of the same family and we shall call you our elder brother. And now let some clothes be brought for our leader, and afterwards we shall pay our respects to heaven and earth." And forthwith a set of silk robes was brought out, together with a new hat and a pair of new boots. Fang Te soon slipped them on, thereby so improving his appearance that they all applauded and said that such a man as he could not only be their chief but might easily make himself emperor!

"It is easy to be honest while the eye does not see what the heart may covet," the proverb says. Fang Te was but a poor student; he had never in all his life worn such clothes, and he was now suddenly fired with new ideas and his pre-

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"Some accident might happen to you!"

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judices all underwent a complete transformation. He began to think over what the men had said to him and he had to acknowledge that there was a great deal of sound reason in their contentions. "It is indeed true," he thought, "that the present Prime Minister Yang Kuo-chung accepts bribes quite openly, and no one could say how many fine scholars are hopelessly buried underneath their own poverty! Now my own talents and learning are but of a mediocre kind, and I really can never hope to get an official post. If I do not obtain any appointment I shall be miserably poor all my life, whereas if I join with these people I shall at least be very well off for food and clothes. Moreover, the cold weather is even now coming on and I cannot possibly put on those old clothes again. I should never have been able to wheedle that cloth out of my wife! And, furthermore, not one of my friends or relations would have lifted a finger to help me in any way!

"Besides, when one comes to think of it, these robbers are at least hospitable people, and to me, whom they have never seen before, they have given this magnificent outfit of clothes, and have made me their leader. I think that perhaps I *will* relax my principles slightly, and do what they want me to do; and then the rest of my life I shall spend in comfort. . . . But, on the other hand, supposing I were to be arrested! . . . No, no, it will not do! I should have my head taken off to a certainty!"

And he became terribly perplexed, his internal organs being all twisted up in disarray by reason of his agony of fear and indecision, and he could come to no definite conclusion.

But while he was thinking thus, the rest of the band had drawn round the altar, on which incense was burning, and soon the carcases of a pig and a sheep were brought out and laid in the open, and the whole eighteen of them, including Fang Te, knelt down before them and burned incense and swore allegiance to the band, each having first smeared his

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lips with the blood of the victims, and called upon heaven and earth to be witness of their oath.

The others all then ko-towed eight times to Fang Te to confirm their compact, and each told his name to him.

Shortly afterwards meat and drink were set out, and Fang Te was allotted the place of honour at the table. Both food and wine were of the best and everyone had his fill. Fang Te, as a general rule, had nothing at all but rice to eat, and indeed very little of that; and though on rare occasions it did happen that he got hold of a little meat or wine, he had hardly ever in his life before had a full meal. Now that he was confronted with such a feast, he was pleased beyond bounds. Everyone wished to drink his health, and "Oh, Elder Brother, a cup of wine with you!" was heard on all sides. This flattered him exceedingly and his face became illumined with smiles. He had at first been unable to make up his mind whether to throw in his lot with the robbers or not, but now he felt determined like iron to do so.

"It may be the best piece of luck that could have befallen me," he reflected, "to have met these new brothers of mine! Who can tell what great good fortune may not come of all this? If I can only confine my actions somewhat, and commit myself only two or three times, I may be able to put together quite a nice little fortune, and then I can stop without anybody being any the wiser! I may then, perhaps, be able to come to some understanding with Yang Kuo-chung and buy for myself an official post; that will indeed be a fine thing!

"And if by some unlucky chance the facts were to leak out, I shall have already exceeded my rightful share of comfort, even though I should be put to death by the slicing process! In any case I shall be well content, for it is better than a life of misery from cold and hunger and a death from starvation at the end!"

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Thus did Fang Te justify his actions; but here is a verse to sum up the situation:

"The darkness falls, the rain streams down, the cold north winds do blow;
The helpless boat drifts straight upon the cruel rocks below!
Full well he knew that his rash act would surely lead to wreck,
But a starving man will seldom stop to think about his neck!"

All the band continued drinking with each other until it was dark, when one of them said: "To-day is our elder brother's first appearance! Ought we not to celebrate it by doing some profitable stroke of business?"

And the rest said that it was an excellent suggestion and they consulted with one another as to where they should go.

"Of all the rich men of the city," observed Fang Te, "none is more affluent than old Wang Yuan-pao, who lives hard by the Yen Ping Gate! His dwelling is outside the wall and not on the regular beat of the city watchmen. I know all the roads thereabouts, and you will find in his house ten times the booty that you will find in other establishments! What do you all say to that?"

"That is indeed a capital plan, elder brother," the rest agreed, eagerly. "We have had that old man's place in our mind's eye for some time past! We were only waiting for our chance; what a lucky thing that you are also in favour of it. That proves that you are of one mind with ourselves!"

So the wine and meats were put away and they got ready their sulphur and saltpetre (Note 28), their torches and their weapons and all the other implements of their trade.

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"A turban wound around each head;
Long black leggings each one wears;
Faces daubed with black and red;
Armed with axes, knives and spears;
Breeches ending at the knee;
Jackets reaching to the hip;
Girdles tight as tight can be
(Flowing robes might mean a slip!),
Like a band of imps from down below on ill-adventure bent,
Or a herd of tigers fierce who prowl about with fell intent!"

When all was ready they waited till about midnight, and then, leaving the premises by a side door, they bolted it on the outside and made off as fast as a gust of wind. The Yen Ping Gate was about two miles from the Park of Joyful Wandering and they did not take long on the way.

Now it must be stated that Wang Yüan-pao was a cousin of Wang Hung, the Governor of the city. His wealth was sufficient to ransom an empire and his name was everywhere a household word. Indeed the Son of Heaven, Yüan Tsung the Emperor, often had him to audience. And it had happened three days before the evening of which we speak, that some articles had been pilfered from his house. He duly reported the matter to Wang Hung, who put the case into the hands of the local guardian of the peace, and the latter had sent some thirty braves to give temporary protection to the premises. This was unexpected bad luck for Fang Te and his band, who ran right into the trap! They got ready their powder to set fire to the house and kindled their torches, thus illuminating the whole place as though it had been day, and had taken out their knives and axes to hack down the inner doors, when the braves and the servants were aroused from their dreams. The alarm was given by shouts and banging of gongs, and all of them dashed out, armed with sticks and weapons of all kinds to arrest the robbers. The neighbours also, hearing the commotion, came to their aid,

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and the robbers soon saw that they were greatly outnumbered and began to lose heart. They managed to set fire to part of the premises, but many of them took to their heels and escaped in the darkness. The men of the Wang household divided themselves up into two parties, one to put out the fire, the other to deal with the robbers. They surrounded some of the latter, who at first prepared to fight to the death, and several of the villagers were wounded, but the robbers' position was a hopeless one and some of them lay stunned upon the ground. Of the rest, as many as could, threw their arms down and dashed off into the night. Fang Te was among those who were wounded, and he with others in like plight were soon trussed up with ropes. They were guarded until daybreak, when they were sent under a strong escort into the city and taken to the yamen of the Governor. And the latter sent them on to a certain magistrate named Li Mien to be examined.

Now this magistrate was a member of the royal clan, and happened to be a man of great compassion and strong character. He was, moreover, of unusual ability and always so conducted affairs that he brought assistance to his generation and security to the populace. But Yang Kuo-chung had just succeeded Li Lin-fu as Prime Minister, and the two of them had discouraged his talents and restricted his powers, thus sapping the strength of the country and depriving the people of the full benefit of his ability. Li Mien had therefore only a subordinate post and was unable to employ his gifts to the full. But although his official rank was a low one, yet he had the power of life and death, for apprehended robbers were all sent for trial to the magistrate, who also had the preliminary hearing of all criminal appeal cases.

The magistrates before him were all men of great savagery and made a speciality of the famous but cruel methods of torture and examination that had been devised in former days, as enumerated in the following verse, written in the rhythm known as " Moonlight on the West River " :

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"The Calf Strung Up beneath The Cart" will cause you agony profound;
"The Ass tied tightly to The Post" will make you scream and leap around;
"The Phoenix drying both her Wings" to death itself will bring you near;
"The Boy who Sits and Contemplates," the stoutest soul will cause to fear;
"The Jade Girl going up the Stairs" wrings from the bravest awful sounds;
"The Fairy holding out The Fruit" will give the most distressing wounds;
And if "The Ape Avoids the Fire" does not produce a speedy "Yes,"
"The Night-imp looking at The Lake" will quickly make the wretch confess!

These savage officials used such dreadful tortures as the above; firstly, to make their names feared, and secondly, to enable them to settle promptly (Note 29) all cases deputed to them by their superiors. Never did they really concern themselves with getting at the truth of a case, but at once had recourse to their horrible methods to obtain a confession and thus complete the hearing. All accused persons, even those with nerves of steel and bones of brass, were soon terrified and racked into subjection, and who can say how many honest officials and noble scholars have been thus done to death!

But Li Mien was not like the rest of them. He was all for justice and mercy, and never used these horrible methods of examination. Nevertheless he spared no pains to get at the true facts of every case, and no false decisions were ever given by him.

On the day in question, he was to hold an early sitting of his court when the Governor sent the case to be tried by him. There were about ten robbers and five or six wounded

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villagers, and when he took his seat they all knelt before him, and the murderous weapons which had been employed in the case were all arranged in rows before the steps.

Li Mien looked the prisoners over, and noticed Fang Te among them—a big man, strong and fine-looking, with an unusual bearing. He thought it strange that one with so distinguished an appearance could be a robber; and he felt a wave of compassion for him. He first asked the braves and the men of the Wang household concerning the facts of the robbery, and next inquired his name of each of the robbers, making minute inquiry of all those who had been apprehended at the time of the robbery. The prisoners did not wait for torture to be applied, but each one confessed, and they readily stated their dwelling place and named the others of the gang—to arrest whom Li Mien at once sent out runners. When he came to Fang Te, the latter crawled up on all fours to the magistrate's table.

"I, your servant," he said, sobbing bitterly, "have from my earliest youth been a student and never intended to become a robber. But because of the poverty of my household, I had no resources whatever; and only yesterday I went out to beg a loan from my relations and acquaintance. I turned in at the Temple of Beautiful Clouds to shelter from the rain, and there I was deceived by this gang of robbers and compelled to join their ranks. I had, indeed, no power to refuse." And then he told the tale of the headless bird and indeed the whole story of his adventures.

Li Mien had already been struck with Fang Te's appearance and his evident talent, and came to the conclusion that he was telling the truth, so he conceived a desire to pardon and release him. But he reflected that the whole gang was equally guilty and that he would hardly avoid scandal if he were to release one man, for the case had been deputed to him by the higher court, and it would be difficult to explain his action. So he turned the matter over in his mind, and

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then, pretending to be angry, he shouted to the attendants to take them all away and put each man in irons and to throw them into the dungeon until the rest of the band had been brought before him. He then told the villagers to return home and have their hurts attended to, and he rewarded the braves with money.

After the last had been dismissed, he summoned the headman of the gaol, one Wang T'ai, to come before him. Now this man in past years had offended the former magistrate, who had falsely accused him of a crime and had sentenced him to death. Being still in prison, awaiting execution, when Li Mien took over charge, he had been lucky enough to obtain a re-hearing of his case. He was then released and given back his employment in the yamen. Thus he was under a great debt of gratitude, and there was no service that he would not have performed for Li Mien, who increased the obligation by promoting him to be headman of the gaol. On this occasion, when he appeared, Li Mien addressed him as follows

"Amongst that lot of robbers, there is a man called Fang Te. I have carefully studied his countenance, and I have come to the conclusion that he is a man of good character. His evidence also carried conviction with it; in fact I am of the opinion that he is an able and respectable person who has not yet met with his share of good fortune. I would much like to let him go, but, as everyone will know of it if I acquit him in open court, I am unwilling to do it in that way. Can you not think of any scheme by which he can be allowed to make his escape from the gaol?" And he took out three taels of silver and handed it over to the headman, telling him that it was for Fang Te to help him get away, after his escape, to some remote place where he could conceal himself, for if he remained, the magistrate said, in the vicinity, he would be sure to be recaptured.

"I would not dare to disregard your instructions, sir," said Wang T'ai, "but will not a wrong thereby be done to

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the gaolers, who will be held answerable for the escape of the prisoner? What can be done about that?"

"Well," replied Li Mien, "suppose that, after you have released him, you were to bring your wife and family into my yamen very secretly; then, in my report to my superiors, I could put the blame on you and say that you had disappeared also. No one outside will be any the wiser and you can then act as my body-servant, which will be better than your present employment!"

"If indeed, sir, you will allow me," replied Wang T'ai, "to take shelter in your yamen and look after you, that will be most satisfactory!" And, taking the silver, he left the yamen and hurried to the prison.

"Those criminals who were lately admitted," he said to the gaolers, "without having been either beaten or tortured, are not all to be confined together! If you let them get together they will probably concoct some desperate plan of escape." So the gaolers went off and locked up each man separately.

Wang T'ai himself led Fang Te away and locked him up by himself in a somewhat remote part of the prison, and, having told him of the magistrate's charitable intention towards him, he handed the money over to him. Fang Te's surprise and joy knew no bounds. "May I beg you, kind sir," he said, "to convey my gratitude to the magistrate and tell him that if in this life I am unable to serve him I trust that in a future reincarnation I may be born either as a dog or a horse, so that I may repay his most gracious favour to me!"

"The magistrate was most anxious to save you," returned Wang T'ai, "but it was out of pure charity, and he had no thought for a moment of any return. But what he does want is that you should mend your ways and from henceforth do virtuous acts only! It is thus that you can best show your gratitude to him for his bountiful act in saving you from death."

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"For your kind instructions, sir," said Fang Te, "I am indeed most grateful. I would not venture not to observe them!"

Now it was then just getting dark and Wang T'ai went round with the gaolers to lock up each prisoner for the night, each being made fast to his bed. And that night they began with Fang Te, and went on to the rest, taking each in turn. So Wang T'ai waited till they were some distance away and were all busy, when he slipped away unperceived and went back to Fang Te. He loosed his fetters and opened the lock of the cangue (Note 30) and released him, giving some of his own old garments to wear and a hat to pull down over his eyes. Wang T'ai then led him to a lonely corner just inside the gaol gate; there happened to be no one passing, so he quickly opened the wicket and helped him over the door-sill and out.

Fang Te made off with mighty strides and took no heed where he was stepping; he did not dare to go home but made straight for the city gate, out of which he slipped unperceived. All night he walked without stopping, his heart overflowing with gratitude to the gracious official who had saved him from death. He realized that now his best plan was to find someone who would give him shelter and employment, and he bethought himself of An Lu-shan (Note 31), who was still a favourite at court and always had a use for a capable man. "Why not go to him?" he thought, so he took the way that led straight to Fan Yang, and on the road he fell in, by good fortune, with an old friend of his who then held a minor official post at that place. This man expressed his willingness to introduce him to An Lu-shan, and did so on their arrival at Fan Yang.

Now An Lu-shan had already for some time been planning his famous rebellion, and was always on the look-out for desperate men to help him. And finding that Fang Te was a man of unusual strength and stature, with views coinciding with his own, he retained him in his following. Thus Fang

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Te lived for some time, and then sent a messenger secretly to Ch'ang An to fetch his wife and family.

"From out the cruel net he broke away,
His former wretched state is left behind,
A patron strong and kind he finds to-day,
His hateful past is banished from his mind!"

And thus for a while we must leave him.

II

On the evening of Fang Te's escape from the prison, Wang T'ai let it be known among the gaolers that he had suddenly to go home on important business, and telling them to take great care of the prisoners, he handed them the keys and went straight off to his house. He packed up hurriedly, and, after directing his wife to follow him without saying a word to anyone, he moved that night into the magistrate's yamen.

Early next day the gaolers went to let the prisoners loose to get their morning meal, but when they came to Fang Te's cell they only found his fetters lying on one side and no sign of their prisoner. They did not know at what hour he had escaped, and turned pale with apprehension as they thought of the cruel punishments that would inevitably fall upon themselves. "Who would have thought that this wretched fellow," they said, "who was certain of execution, could have disappeared like that? He must have done it on purpose to get us into trouble!" and they walked all round inside the prison wall to try and find where he had got out, but could see no brick nor tile displaced, nor any scrap of mortar lying about to indicate the place where he had climbed over. "This miserable imposter," they said, "told the chief yesterday that he had never committed a crime before! That was a fine lie without a doubt, for he is evidently an old hand at the game!"

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One of them suggested that he should go off and report the escape at once to Mr Wang and get him to ask the magistrate to send out runners without delay so that the runaway might be re-arrested. To this the others agreed, so the man made off as quickly as a puff of smoke and ran to Wang T'ai's house. But there he found the door securely barred, and he got no reply to all the noise he made with his knocking and calling. A neighbour, hearing the to-do, came round and said that there had been a great bustle going on in the house for some four hours during the night and that he thought that the family had moved.

"But I never heard Mr Wang say anything about moving," said the gaoler. "I do not think that he can have done so!"

"And I know that he has no other house in the city but this!" said the other. "I should very much like to know why we cannot get any answer. Perhaps they have all died in their sleep!"

"It may indeed be that they have!" said the gaoler, and then the two of them, using all their strength, burst in the door, which, as they found, had been held by a stake propped up against the inside. Within the house there was nothing at all except some broken furniture, and of course there was nobody to be seen.

"This is indeed very strange!" said the gaoler. "Why has he gone too? It looks a little as if that criminal has bought his escape after all! In any case, it would be an excellent plan for us to say so and put all the blame on to Mr Wang!" So he managed to close the door as he had found it, with the stake propped against the inside, and did not return to the gaol but went straight to the yamen, where he luckily found the magistrate just taking his seat in the court.

When Li Mien heard the story he appeared to be very much astonished. "There!" he said, "I always should have called Wang T'ai a most conscientious and upright man!

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Who would have thought that he would have dared to do such a thing as to let go a desperate criminal like that man? But I expect they cannot have gone far. Go out, all of you, and search everywhere for them. And there will be a big reward for their recapture!"

The gaoler ko-towed and departed, and Li Mien wrote out a despatch to his superiors reporting the occurrence.

When the despatch reached the Governor, Wang Hung, he said that he thought that Li Mien had taken no proper precautions to prevent such a thing happening and therefore was not fit to hold office. He memorialized the throne accordingly and had him reduced to the rank of an ordinary citizen, at the same time putting up large proclamations with a view to the re-arrest of Fang Te and Wang T'ai.

Li Mien, therefore, was compelled to return to his superiors his magistrate's commission and he then packed up his belongings and returned to his home, taking Wang T'ai with him disguised as one of his female servants.

"His generous heart was keen to save a man in parlous state,
Another now he helps avoid a miserable fate!"

III

Now Li Mien and his family were without means, and yet, having been willing to be an entirely upright official, not daring to accept one cash as a bribe, he was nothing but a poor scholar again when he was cashiered. So he went home to his village, and, with the help of the few servants who had accompanied him, he set to work to cultivate his fields to obtain the necessaries of life. Thus he lived for more than two years, and then, being poorer than ever, he left his wife at home and taking Wang T'ai and two servants with him he set off to try and borrow some money from among his former friends. From Lo Yang he went north and

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crossed the Yellow River, with a view to going to Ch'ang Shan to visit one Yen Kao-ching, an old friend of his who had recently been appointed Prefect there.

On his way he passed through a place called Pai Hsiang Hsien, about 200 *li* from Ch'ang Shan; and as they journeyed they saw coming along the road towards them a procession of people carrying official insignia and white staves to clear the road in front of some officer, and calling out: "Alight from your horses and clear the way for His Honour the Magistrate!"

So Li Mien led his beast to the side of the road, and Wang T'ai kept his gaze on the approaching cavalcade. Above the official was held a big black umbrella of state, and the official himself rode a white horse. He was of a proud and fine bearing and was a handsome and distinguished-looking man. Strange to say he very closely resembled the criminal Fang Te whom, two years before, Li Mien had enabled to escape from prison. So Wang T'ai said to his master: "Just look at that magistrate, sir! He is the very double of that man Fang Te whom we let out of gaol two years ago!"

Li Mien had also thought that the magistrate's face was familiar to him, and when he heard these words he was convinced that he really was Fang Te.

"I always said," he remarked, with real pleasure in his voice, "that that was a man who was really very worthy but had not met with his good fortune! You see, I was right! I wonder how he got the appointment. I should like to go up and speak to him; but of course we may be mistaken, and if we are right he will think that we could not have failed to know that he was an official, and have come to claim his gratitude! So let us not say a word!" And he told Wang T'ai to hold his peace and to turn his back to the magistrate as he passed.

And as the latter drew near, he saw them both standing with their backs to the road, but he had already recognized

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them from a distance, with astonishment and pleasure. He quickly stopped his retinue, and alighting from his horse came up and saluted them.

"My benefactor!" he said to Li Mien, "I am Fang Te! Why did you avert your head and make no sound? I might indeed have missed seeing you!"

"We did not know that you were in these parts," replied the other, after returning his salutation. "And, indeed, we were also afraid of delaying your progress towards what is probably the most important official business! And therefore we did not venture to press our acquaintance upon you!"

"How can you speak thus?" returned Fang Te. "It is truly a most welcome and unexpected pleasure to meet you once more! But come, I beg you, and accompany me to my yamen, where you can rest yourselves!"

By this time Li Mien was very wearied with riding and this invitation came most opportunely.

"I am indeed very much obliged to you," he said, "and I shall be most glad to rest for a while and enjoy the pleasure of conversing with you!" So they got again upon their horses and rode along side by side, Wang T'ai following them, and in a short time they reached the magistrate's yamen (Note 32). They rode right up to the reception hall before they dismounted, and then Fang Te invited Li Mien to come into the inner courtyard and enter his library. He instructed his own servants, however, not to follow them but to send one man only, a trusty and capable person whose name was Ch'en Yen, to sit at the entrance to the courtyard and await further orders.

Fang Te also directed that a feast of the best possible kind should be prepared, and had Li Mien's horses led round to the stables and properly fed. Wang T'ai and the other two men that Li Mien had brought with him, he said, were to bring in their master's baggage. He also detailed two special retainers, one of them called Lu Hsin and the other

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Chih Ch'eng, both being slaves that he had purchased since his appointment, to attend to the wants of the party.

You will be curious to know why Fang Te was so anxious to be left alone with Li Mien. The fact was that he had early given out that he was a relation of the famous minister Fang Hsüan-ling, so as to increase the respect of others for his family and position; and his colleagues, who knew nothing about his real origin, accepted this statement as correct and showed him the greatest deference. And therefore, when Li Mien arrived in his yamen, Fang Te was afraid lest his guest might let slip some word which might betray his former experiences in connection with the robber gang. For if that were to happen, Fang Te knew that it would soon be repeated and spread abroad, thus bringing him into disrepute and terminating his official career. So he took care to prevent anyone coming in to overhear their first conversation together.

Thus Li Mien followed the magistrate into the library. The latter consisted of three rooms connected together and facing the south, and there was a flanking room on either side of it; it was very spacious and the windows let in plenty of light. Small tables and couches were set about conveniently and the trays and the utensils and ornaments were all extremely neat and elegant. The bookcases were well filled with books and pictures (Note 33) and flowers were placed here and there in pots and vases, the whole, in fact, being a model of refinement and propriety; for here it was that the magistrate used to study, and occasionally take a siesta.

It was this room, then, into which Fang Te ushered Li Mien. He hurriedly placed a chair in the centre of the main apartment and requesting his guest to be seated, he performed a ko-tow before him. Li Mien made haste to raise his host. "How can you, sir," he exclaimed, "pay me so much honour?"

"I was a criminal awaiting execution!" replied Fang Te, "and was saved from death by you, my benefactor, who also

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gave me money to enable me to make my escape hither. Thus I was able to rise to become what I am to-day; and thus it is that I consider you as my second father and mother! That I pay my respects to you in this capacity is indeed only fitting!"

Li Mien was a modest man, but when he saw that there was reason in what Fang Te said, he allowed him to ko-tow twice before him, after which the magistrate rose and saluted Wang T'ai also in thanks. He then led the three servants to a separate room, where he told them to sit down and gave them to understand that if his own retainers made any inquiry as to his origin, they were by no means to tell what they knew of his former doings. "No need, sir," replied Wang T'ai, "to give us such orders. We would never have had any intention of saying anything about the matter."

So Fang Te returned to the library and seated himself opposite Li Mien. "I cannot express my gratitude, sir," he said, "for your graciousness in saving my life! Day or night, I am never unmindful of it, and I can never hope to repay my debt. Without a doubt it was the act of heaven that you were guided hither, so that we might meet!"

"You, sir," returned Li Mien, "were for the moment under a cloud, and all that I did was to take advantage of an opportunity that was vouchsafed to me to do a good turn to a deserving man. What virtue is there in such an act that you should feel it so excessively? Do but pass me a cup of tea, and your debt will be repaid!"

Fang Te then questioned Li Mien about his recent doings. "May I inquire, sir," he said, "to what official post you have been appointed that you happen to pass through my district?"

"Owing to your escape, sir," replied Li Mien, "I was reported by the Governor for incompetence and cashiered, so I returned home, where, as my circumstances were somewhat straitened, I continued to wander about among beauti-

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ful scenery in order to divert myself. Just as present I am on my way to Ch'ang An, where an old friend of mine has just been appointed Prefect; and on my road I meet you, much to my surprise. Right glad am I to find that you had obtained official employment!"

"That you, my benefactor," said Fang Te, "should have encountered difficulties and been deprived of your official rank on my account, while I on the other hand have been shameless enough to insinuate myself in this way into the public service, fills me with the greatest remorse!"

"In olden days," returned Li Mien, "it was said that charity towards others is of the first importance, no matter how poor one is oneself. My office was of the most insignificant kind and is not worth giving a thought to. But I should like to hear whither you betook yourself after we last met, and how it was that you obtained this position?"

"After leaving the prison," replied Fang Te, "I ran off to Fan Yang, and there was lucky enough to meet an old friend and he introduced me to General An Lu-shan, who took me into his secretariat. He treated me most considerately and, six months later, gave me the post of Acting Submagistrate. Quite recently the magistrate died and I was recommended to fill the vacancy. I feel, however, ashamed indeed of my mean origin and lack of talent, and, having thus recklessly accepted this post, I must beseech you of your kindness to give me instruction in the rudiments of my official duties."

Now Li Mien, though at the moment without office, had often heard of the intention of An Lu-shan to rebel, and when he learned that Fang Te had obtained his post through the latter, he feared lest his friend should be involved in the coming rebellion. So when he was thus politely asked for his advice, he gave the following warning: "In carrying out your official duties, there is no special difficulty if you will always be loyal to the Emperor above you and abstain from oppressing the people below you. And if you find yourself

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in any very critical position, you must bear in mind the boiling cauldron in front and the executioner's sword behind! (Note 34). Then it is that you must maintain unswerving loyalty to what you know to be right. Do not heed the exhortations of fools, and do not be seduced from your duty in the hope of obtaining benefit! For although, with good luck, you may obtain some slight temporary advantage, yet you may be making yourself into a laughing-stock for posterity! And if you follow this advice, sir, you will not only easily be able to hold this position of magistrate with distinction, but will even be able to carry out successfully the duties of a Minister!"

"I thank you warmly, sir," answered Fang Te, "for your words of jade and gold, which I will retain as vividly as though they were engraved upon my heart and imprinted on my girdle!" And the two sat talking eagerly together until a servant came in to announce that dinner was served. Fang Te then conducted his guest into the dining-hall, where two places were laid on opposite sides of the table (Note 35). But Fang Te ordered the servants to move Li Mien's place to the left-hand side. Seeing this, the latter said: "I beg of you, sir, not to make any alteration, for by so doing you will embarrass me! Please let us sit opposite one another; kindly allow the seats to remain as they were!"

"While you, my benefactor, are here," returned Fang Te, "that I should be seated at all in your presence is unpardonable! How could I venture to be seated as your equal?"

"You and I to-day," replied Li Mien, "are friends in complete accord. Restrain your modesty, I beg of you!" and he told the servants to set the table as originally laid. Food was then brought in, and Fang Te drew back his guest's chair and conducted him to it. And outside the room a band of musicians struck up a tune and the two friends applied themselves to the meats and the wine before them, which were of the best.

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"No Phoenix tail nor Dragon's heart fried in rich fat were there,
Yet the mountains and the sea alike provided dainties rare."

And host and guest feasted right pleasantly and drank deeply and with the utmost harmony; the meal was not over for two hours.

Wang T'ai and the two others were feasted at a table in a side room and it need hardly be said that they, too, were well looked after.

When Fang Te and Li Mien had made merry together to the full, they left the table hand-in-hand and made their way back to the library, and there the host told his servants to bring out a set of the most sumptuous bedding, which he spread with his own hands for his guest, setting out, likewise, all the bedroom utensils.

"But this is the task of a menial!" Li Mien protested. "How can you thus demean yourself?"

"I was the recipient of your great bounty, sir," replied Fang Te, "and while I draw the breath of life I must needs serve you as a footman follows his master's horse. Not one ten-thousandth part of your favour can I hope to repay, and to-day I can only be of the very slightest service to you. This can hardly be considered, indeed, as service at all!"

The bed was thus prepared for Li Mien, and Fang Te had a small bed for himself placed at a respectful distance. And Li Mien, seeing that his host was resolute in his determination to serve him, came to the conclusion that he was a most correct and upright person and was therefore all the more polite towards him. And they sat together in the lamplight and each opened his heart to the other and spoke of his private desires and ambitions. Their views in general proved to be similar and they became the best of friends, only regretting that they had not made each other's acquaintance earlier. It was late at night before they retired to rest.

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IV

Next day, Fang Te's colleagues, hearing of Li Mien's arrival, came in a body to call upon him; and when they arrived Fang Te explained to them that his friend was one who in former years had favoured him with a recommendation for office and that therefore he was under an obligation to him, and his colleagues who were anxious to stand well in the opinion of the magistrate all gave banquets in Li Mien's honour. Suffice it to say that Fang Te spent the following few days in feasting and conversing, and transacted no official business at all. Nor indeed did he go even once to the innermost courtyard of his yamen, where his family lived, but waited on Li Mien all the time and considered him solely. In fact he could not have done more for him if he had been a filial son attending to the wants of his parents.

Li Mien felt somewhat embarrassed by these attentions, involving as they did the laying aside of all the duties of the magistrate's office, and after a stay of some ten days prepared to take his leave. But Fang Te refused to allow him to depart.

"Now that you have come here," he said, "and we have got to know each other so well, there is no reason why you should go away so soon! Please remain for another month or so and then I shall send you forth with an appropriate retinue to escort you to Ch'ang Shan!"

"I also am unwilling that we should part," replied Li Mien, "for I have been right royally entertained. But you, sir, are a magistrate, and your official duties are being neglected owing to my presence here. Should this become known to the higher authorities, an unsatisfactory situation might arise! Moreover, I have made up my mind to depart, and if you detain me here it will not at all accord with my desires!"

On hearing these words, Fang Te came to the conclusion

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that he could not well keep his guest longer. "If you are indeed determined to depart, my benefactor," he said, "I cannot find it in my heart to offer opposition, but who can say when we shall meet again? To-morrow I shall prepare a final feast, that we may spend your last day here in pleasant intercourse together; and the day after at daybreak you shall go forth if you must."

"I bow to your kind wishes," replied Li Mien, "and will remain one more day!" And thus it was arranged by Fang Te, who called a servant and went into the innermost courtyard, where he usually lived, in order to prepare a present to give to his guest on his departure.

And from this circumstance there arose a most serious consequence, for thereby Magistrate Li very nearly lost his life! How true it is that:

> "Misfortune often follows on success,
> Success misfortune often lurks behind,
> So he who sets his mind on happiness,
> From strife removed, retains a peaceful mind."

V

And now we must speak of Pei Shih, the wife of Fang Te.

In former years, when the days of his poverty were yet upon him, Fang Te became used to leaving the decisions of matters to his wife, and now that he had become an official she still insisted upon settling every difficulty that arose. On this occasion she heard that her husband had summoned from his house two servants, and when neither they nor he returned for ten days, she thought that he must be doing something which he wished to keep secret from her, and she became extremely agitated in her heart. When, therefore, she beheld her husband at last coming back to the house, she determined to assert herself and give him a piece of her

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mind. She was resolved to have a full account of what he had been doing; but she first pretended to be all smiles, as she asked him what was going on outside that had kept him so long from home.

"It is, I need hardly tell you," he replied, "our great benefactor who is here! And to think that I nearly missed seeing him! But by good fortune, I did see him and brought him here, so we have been making each other's acquaintance during the last few days. And now I have come to consult with you about how I can best get together some suitable present for him to take away with him when he goes."

"I do not know of whom you speak," replied his wife. "What great benefactor is this?"

"Ai Ya! How could you have forgotten!" Fang Te exclaimed. "Why, of course, it is Mr Li Mien, the magistrate who saved my life three years ago! And he had to relinquish his post owing to my escape! He is on his way now to Ch'ang Shan to visit Prefect Yen. And the former head gaoler Wang T'ai is also here with him!"

"Oh, *that* man!" returned his wife, with no interest in her tone. "And how much do you propose to give him?"

"This great benefactor of mine," said Fang Te, "is my second father and mother, and the expression of my gratitude to him must necessarily take a very substantial form."

"Well," answered Pei Shih, "I suppose that about ten rolls of silk would be enough."

Fang Te laughed aloud. "You are joking, wife," he said. "Such a present would be too small even to give to the servant of one who has done me so great a service!"

"You speak like a fool!" replied his wife. "You are but a magistrate and we cannot really afford to give away even ten rolls of silk. How can the servant of a parasite like this expect to receive such a present? I must really see to this matter! If we are actually driven to it, we might manage twenty rolls for the man, but we must get rid of him without delay!"

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"Wife," said Fang Te, "it is most unfitting that you should give vent to such ungenerous sentiments! He saved my life; he gave me money to make good my escape; and by so doing he forfeited his official position. What are twenty pieces of silk in comparison to that?"

Now Pei Shih was naturally extremely mean; she felt that she could not possibly part with so much silk, but seeing that it was for a man who had saved her husband's life, she was willing to make a concession and agreed, though she thought at the same time that it would be too handsome a present. And seeing from her husband's expression that he still thought it not enough, she was greatly irritated; so, just to see what he would say, she suggested that he should give him a hundred rolls!

"Well," replied Fang Te, "a hundred rolls would be about correct as a present for Wang T'ai!"

"If you are going to give Wang T'ai a hundred rolls," answered his wife, who by this time was much annoyed, "you would have to give to Li Mien at least five hundred!"

"Five hundred rolls would not be enough!" returned her husband, shortly.

"Make it a thousand, then," said Pei Shih angrily, "and have done with it!"

"That," replied Fang Te, "would, I think, be about right!"

On hearing these words, Pei Shih became so angry that she spat in her husband's face. "Ugh! You have taken leave of your senses!" she snapped at him. "You have only held office for a short while, and you have never given *me* anything to speak of! How can you even think of such wanton extravagance? I suppose that you would like to sell your wife as a slave, and even that would not be half enough for you to do for him! Where do you propose to get all that silk, I should like to know?"

Fang Te saw that his wife was now thoroughly excited,

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so he said: "Wife, let us talk this matter over quietly. Why get so angry about it?"

"What need of discussion?" shouted the woman. "If you have the silk, give it to him and have done with it, and do not talk to me any more about it!"

"Of course I have not got the silk," answered Fang Te; "I shall have to borrow the price of it from my official moneys!"

"What a monstrous suggestion!" cried his wife in a loud and angry tone. "As vast as heaven itself is your gall! (Note 36). The money in the treasury is part of the imperial revenues, and you have the audacity to propose to use it for private purposes! Suppose that the higher authorities were suddenly to call for an account, what sort of a reply would you be able to give?"

These words made Fang Te think a little, and he replied uneasily: "What you say, wife, is not unreasonable, but my benefactor is in a hurry to depart! I have no alternative in such an emergency! Whatever is to be done?" And he sat for a few minutes in thought.

And Pei Shih, strangely enough, seeing that her husband was determined on making so generous a gift, felt as ill at ease as though he had proposed to tear the flesh from her bones and cut up her bowels into a thousand fragments. She therefore suddenly formed a most base resolution.

"In vain," said she, "have you been born as a man! You can never make up your mind! What is the use of your being a high official? I have a plan, now, which will put a stop to all this folly; one resolute step, and you will have no more trouble!"

Fang Te, thinking that she had no other than a charitable intention, asked her what her plan was.

"From ancient times it has been said that great obligations must be repaid," she said. "Why not find a favourable opportunity this very night and put an end to his life and thus be rid of him forever!"

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At these words Fang Te became crimson to the ears with anger. "Wretched woman!" he said. "At the very beginning, it was you who, by your refusal to give me the cloth that I asked you for to make into clothes, drove me out to seek relief from my friends; and thus it was your fault that I was deceived into joining that band of robbers and so came within a hair's-breadth of losing my life! If it had not been for this noble-minded man, who forfeited his office to enable me to escape, we should not have been this day in one another's company! And instead of urging me to do uprightly, you would now have me murder my benefactor! How can you think such evil!"

And Pei Shih, seeing that her husband was really angry with her, smiled a propitiatory smile and said: "If what I advise is good, why get angry? If my advice is reasonable, you had better take it! If, on the other hand, my plan is a bad one, you need not be guided by it. I do not see the necessity for all this display of feeling!"

"How can there be reason in such talk?" asked Fang Te.

"Well," replied his wife, "you say that I refused to give you that stuff long ago, and that you have ever since borne resentment against me in consequence! Now, just reflect a little! Since I was seventeen years old I have been your wife; and for your daily needs, food and clothing and all, you have been entirely dependent upon my efforts! You cannot really think that I was indeed unwilling to give you those two pieces of cloth! I was but thinking of the case of Su Chin (Note 37). When his family refused to help him, he rose to be a minister of the Six States, and I hoped that you would be roused to action by the recollection of that old story and would emulate his example. I never thought that you would be so unlucky as to fall in with those robbers and would be so lacking in the force of character shown by Su Chin as to get involved in such a predicament! That you thus committed yourself was indeed quite unnecessary, and cannot be attributed to me! And do you really imagine

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that Li Mien acted out of benevolence in allowing you to escape!"

"Why, of course he did!" replied Fang Te. "It is impossible to think that he had any other motive!"

"Why will you not use your wits," asked his wife with a smile, "and try to understand the real significance of his act? These magistrates are all avaricious and cruel! Even if their own relatives fall into their clutches they show no mercy! What, then, could you expect, who were quite unknown to this man? Moreover, there was no doubt whatever about your offence. How could he possibly jeopardize his own position by releasing so lightly one who had admittedly committed a capital crime?

"Without doubt he had heard that you were the leader of the gang and therefore he imagined that you were certain to have an accumulation of wealth hoarded up somewhere, and when he let you go he expected that you would, without doubt, give him a large sum of money by way of expressing your gratitude! With this windfall he would have purchased the good opinion of his superiors, and his position as magistrate would thereby have been firmly established. Then he would have been able to accumulate a fortune for himself very rapidly. If this is not so, why should he have singled you out from the rest? How could he have known that what you said was true and that you were a novice in crime and as poor as a rat to boot? Then you disappeared like a puff of smoke and he had to give up his post! And now he has found out that you have obtained this position and he comes after you hot foot!"

"It cannot be so," said Fang Te, shaking his head. "You are entirely mistaken. In releasing me he was actuated solely by generosity, and he had not the least ulterior motive. It was just by chance that, on his way to Ch'ang Shan, he happened to meet me on the road. Indeed, fearing to delay me on my official duties, he even averted his head when I passed and would not recognize me! It cannot be that he

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came here on purpose to get what he could out of me! You must not indeed blacken the characters of others in such a way!"

"Tcha!" ejaculated Pei Shih. "It is all a lie about his going to Ch'ang Shan! How can you believe such a thing? The mere fact that he has Wang T'ai with him shows what his real intentions are! You are really extraordinarily slow-witted! Li Mien is an old acquaintance of Prefect Yen. If it were really true that he is on his way to visit him, why should he take Wang T'ai, a man who was head gaoler in the capital? *He* could not be an old friend of Prefect Yen's and be on his way to see him! And as for what you say about their averting their heads and not claiming acquaintance with you, I will wager that Li Mien was watching you out of the corner of his eye all the time! That was all part of his plot. Moreover, if he were really on his way to Ch'ang Shan, what is he doing here so long?"

"But he does not want to remain," remonstrated Fang Te, "and it is only at my earnest request that he has stayed so long!"

"That, too, is a piece of intentional deceit on his part," said his wife, "just to prove whether you are sincere or not in your treatment of him!"

Now, as you have already concluded, Fang Te was a man of very little strength of character, and when he had heard his wife's arguments he gradually became half-convinced, against his will, that she was right, and being in two minds he sat for a long while in thought without speaking, and Pei Shih began again.

"This act of his in saving your life is one which *could* never be repaid!" she said. "If you now give him what he considers too little, he will turn round on you suddenly and expose the story of your former experiences, and then you will have to bid farewell to your official career! And calamity will not stop there, for you will certainly also be arrested for robbery and prison-breaking and will quickly

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be executed. If, on the other hand, you recompense him adequately, he will, I feel sure, regard it merely as a first instalment and he will always expect a like sum at intervals. If you are then able to pay up promptly all will be well, but should you ever fall short in your payment, he will be sure to re-open the whole matter and you will not be able to escape. Better make an end of the whole business at once!

"The old saying has it: 'If you strike, strike first and strike hard!' And if you do not heed my words now, there will come a time when you will regret it and then your regret will be in vain!"

At this point Fang Te began unconsciously to agree with what his wife said, and he experienced a remarkable revulsion of feeling. After some thought he spoke again. "At first my only thought was how to repay his benevolent and virtuous act! And he never once alluded to it! I can really hardly believe that he had it in his mind at all!"

"He was only waiting," said Pei Shih with a smile, "to see what you would offer, and that is the only reason why he did not mention the matter. But he certainly would have spoken as soon as you brought up the subject. And there is one more thing. Although he *may* not yet have spoken of this affair, your official position is still hanging by a thread!"

"How is that?" asked her husband.

"When Li Mien arrived," she answered, "you treated him very handsomely. But the yamen servants know nothing of any tie between you, and are certain to ask Li Mien's men about the matter and they will be sure to disclose all. You know what tale-bearers all these yamen-men are, and when they hear that their much respected master began life as a robber, the news will spread like wild-fire. Your colleagues will get to hear of it very soon, and although they will hardly laugh at you before your face, behind your back they will talk freely enough and your position will become impossible. For very shame you will have to resign! That

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will be terrible! Li Mien is a good friend of Prefect Yen, and will be sure to tell him every detail. They say that the old man has a curious temper, and you are his subordinate. The story will soon become common gossip north of the river and you will not be able to escape, even by night! You will become as poor as ever you were before, and then what will you do? But if you act quickly now, Prefect Yen will be prevented from doing any harm!"

Now Fang Te always dreaded lest Li Mien's men would gossip about him, which was the reason why he had warned Wang T'ai; and all that his wife said on the subject gave expression to his own fears. So his original intention to express his gratitude was abandoned as thoroughly as though it had been cast into the ocean, and he came to the conclusion that everything that his wife had said was correct and that she had saved him only by a little from working his own undoing.

But he realized, of course, that everyone in his yamen had heard of Li Mien's arrival, and he knew that if his guest were to disappear suddenly, there would certainly be suspicions of foul play. Moreover, there would be four corpses to be got rid of! But when he gave expression to these fresh difficulties, his wife had an expedient all ready.

"That will be easy," said she. "Wait a little longer here and then go back to the yamen. Keep only one or two reliable men within the gates and allow the rest to go out and amuse themselves. Make your guest and his three servants drunk with wine, and then have them despatched about midnight; put their bodies in the library and then set fire to that part of the place. To-morrow there will be nothing to show except a few charred bones. Pretend to go into mourning for them and bury their remains decently. Everyone will then think that they have been burned to death, and no suspicions will be aroused!"

Fang Te thought that this plan was quite a feasible one and was for putting it into action forthwith. But his wife

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knew that her husband was so irresolute that as soon as he entered again into conversation with Li Mien he would be quite likely to repent of his determination and change his mind all over again. So she told him that it was too early to begin yet and that he had better stay with her a little longer, to which Fang Te readily assented. It is only too true that:

"The tiger's fangs are swift to wound,
Envenomed is the hornet's dart,
But worse than either will be found
The poison in a woman's heart!"

VI

"Walls have ears," says the old proverb. "Look out of the window before you tell a secret!" And while Fang Te and his wife were thus engaged in conversation, first about the amount of the proposed present and afterwards about the contemplated murder, neither of them had taken precautions to prevent their being overheard, but had taken it for granted that there was no one within earshot.

So Pei Shih let her tongue run away with her, never guessing that the servant, Lu Hsin, had been attracted by the loud tones in which she had first expressed her indignation, and had crept into the adjoining room. The man then, crouching up against the wooden partition, had overheard every word that had passed, all the wrangling and argument and exhortation, and all about the plan to conceal the murder by burning down the library. He was naturally very startled.

"So my master was once a robber, and had his life saved by this official Li Mien," he thought to himself. "And now he proposes to pay him back like that! What a wicked plan! If it is thus that he treats his benefactor, what sort of treatment can his servants expect! If I should make any sort of

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mistake in the course of my duties, he will make very short work of me! There is but small profit in serving so blood-thirsty a scoundrel as this! The old saying has is that 'To save a man's life is more beneficial than to erect a seven-storied pagoda'; why should not I save the lives of these four men? I shall, maybe, acquire a little merit by so doing! But if I warn them and enable them to escape, I shall receive scant mercy from my master! I had better join them when they get away." So, taking every precaution not to be seen or heard, Lu Hsin crept silently out of the private quarters, and, after secreting a few taels of silver in his clothes, he hurried straight to the library.

In the compound outside it he found Chih Ch'eng sitting on the door-sill of the side rooms with a fan in his hand and a tea-kettle over a charcoal brazier before him. But he was nodding, half asleep. Lu Hsin did not rouse him but went on towards the library itself, hoping to find Wang T'ai. No one could he find, however, but Li Mien, who was in the library sitting upright at a table and reading a book.

Coming to the side of the table, Lu Hsin whispered: "Sir, ill-luck is about to befall you! If you do not leave this yamen soon you may not be able to leave it at all!"

Li Mien was very much startled at this announcement, and asked whence the ill-luck might be expected to come. Lu Hsin led him into a far corner and there told him all that he had overheard. "And being of the opinion," he concluded, "that Your Honour was a blameless man about to be murdered without a just cause, I have purposely come to warn you. If you do not go now, you will hardly escape calamity!"

Li Mien, on hearing the other's startling tale, experienced the feelings of one unexpectedly plunged into cold water, for he shivered all over and his skin became damp with cold moisture. But he managed hastily to salute the servant in thanks and to say: "If it had not been for your benevolent warning, sir, I, Li Mien, would undoubtedly have lost my

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life! I am overwhelmed with gratitude at the magnitude of your virtue and kindness, which I will endeavour generously to repay, not following the example of the ungrateful individual in our immediate vicinity!" Lu Hsin then hurriedly knelt to ko-tow to Li Mien, and rising up again he said: "Do not speak loud, Your Honour! I am afraid lest Chih Ch'eng will hear us and go and inform my master, and then it will be bad for both of us!"

"But if I escape," said Li Mien, "will you not get into trouble, sir? How, then, shall I be at peace?"

"I have neither wife nor home," replied the other; "I will wait for Your Honour's escape and then follow you. Have no fear!"

"If that is your intention," answered Li Mien, "why not come with me and let us escape together to Ch'ang Shan?"

"Should you be willing to take me with you," said Lu Hsin, "I would be only too ready to accompany you, and I will carry your whip behind your horse and attend you as a servant!"

"You are a man of great benevolence," returned Li Mien, "to speak thus. But Wang T'ai and the two others have gone out to buy sandals for the road; what shall we do about them? And our horses are all in the stable at the back of the yamen, how shall we get hold of them?"

Lu Hsin promised to go and find Wang T'ai and the others and also to do his best to find and bring round the horses, and he went out quickly. But as he passed along, he turned his head to look for Chih Ch'eng. The latter was no longer nodding on the door-sill and was nowhere to be seen! Lu Hsin went into the adjoining rooms and looked everywhere but Chih Ch'eng had disappeared!

As a matter of fact he had happened to go away to his own quarters in the front of the yamen to get his flint and tinder, but Lu Hsin did not know this and made up his mind that he must have been overheard by Chih Ch'eng, who had gone off to report the matter to the magistrate, so he stood

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still in fear and irresolution. Then, turning round, he hurried back to the library. "Alas! Your Honour," he said, "I fear that Chih Ch'eng has overheard all and gone and reported it to the master! Let us go at once and not wait for your servants!"

At these words Li Mien started, and was unable to utter a word from his fright. His hands fell from the luggage that he was putting together and he hurried out of the library with Lu Hsin, just as he stood. The yamen attendants in the outer courtyard, seeing him thus hastily going out, got up from their seats as he passed, but Li Mien, making two strides into one, took no notice of them and in an instant found himself in the outermost courtyard. There, by the good luck of heaven, he found tethered the emergency horses of the magistrate and sub-magistrate ready for use. Lu Hsin at once had an idea, so, addressing the attendant ma-fu (groom), he said:

"His Honour, Mr Li, wishes to ride out and pay a call near the west gate of the city. Quickly, therefore, lead these horses outside!" And the ma-fu, seeing that it was the honoured guest of his master and one of the servants from the private quarters, did not think of refusing, and the two had hardly got astride the beasts when Wang T'ai suddenly appeared before them.

"Ah, Wang T'ai, you are welcome!" said Lu Hsin. "Come quickly and accompany His Honour on his call!" And calling the ma-fu he bade him bring out another horse for him to ride. Thus they all three started out together, and the ma-fu was just about to follow them on foot when Lu Hsin turned to him again. "The magistrate is just about to send orders to you to groom down His Honour's horses properly this evening in preparation for his journey to Ch'ang Shan to-morrow. Which of you he will tell to do this, I cannot say, but you will certainly get orders in a few minutes, so there is no need for you to follow us!"

So the ma-fu halted and thanked Lu Hsin for the warning,

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and the three riders emerged from the yamen, and crossing the bridge beyond turned westwards. Just outside they met the other two servants coming from the opposite direction with their stock of sandals. "Where are you going?" they asked Wang T'ai.

The latter said that he did not know, but Li Mien ordered them to follow quickly and not to ask questions. They then whipped up their horses and proceeded. Wang T'ai, seeing that his master was very agitated, and not knowing about any call that it was necessary for him to make, became rather apprehensive but followed without speaking further, the two others striding after them as if their lives depended on their speed. Soon they approached the west gate, and through it they saw in the distance three men riding in towards the city, one behind the other like fishes swimming in procession. Lu Hsin recognized the leader as Ch'en Yen, the steward of the magistrate's yamen, and the second man as one of the office clerks; the third he did not know.

When they got close to them, Ch'en Yen and the clerk, recognising Li Mien, leaped down from their saddles and greeted him. The proverb says: "Danger quickens the wits"; and it was so in this case, for Lu Hsin called out to Li Mien: "Your Honour still lacks mounts for your two servants! Could you not borrow two horses from Mr Ch'en, the steward?"

Li Mien thought this a clever suggestion, and stopping his horse said that if that were possible it would be very satisfactory.

"His Honour is riding out of the city to pay a call," said Lu Hsin to the steward, "and would be very much obliged if you would lend him your two horses for his servants to ride. They are running behind us and will be here in a minute."

The steward was only too anxious to do a service to Li Mien and thus please him, so that he might mention his name favourably to his master. He agreed with alacrity and

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requested him to take their two beasts at once. A moment later the two men came up, hot and breathless, and Ch'en Yen handed over to them the reins of the two horses and the riding whips. The two servants sprang into their saddles and followed Li Mien out of the gate as fast as they could ride. And the twenty hooves of their horses flicked up behind like bowls, the fore and hind feet of each beast meeting and parting like the arms of a cymbal-player in an orchestra, as they dashed along the highway to Ch'ang Shan.

"The jade cage is broken through, the phoenix now flies forth,
The dragon having snapped his bonds escapes towards the north!"

VII

It is now time to speak of Chih Ch'eng. He returned duly to the library, bearing tea on a tray, and, not seeing Li Mien there, searched high and low for him, but no trace of him could he find. So he concluded that the guest had become wearied after sitting indoors for so long and had gone outside for a stroll. Two hours elapsed and he still did not return, so Chih Ch'eng left the library compound to investigate. As he went he met the magistrate, his master, who up till then had been detained in the inner courtyard by his wife. However, he left her at last and his departure was signalled by the sounding of the gong. Happening by chance to meet Chih Ch'eng he asked him if he had seen Lu Hsin. Chih Ch'eng said that he had not but that he thought that he had gone out for a stroll with His Honour Li Mien. Fang Te then began to suspect that there was something in the wind and told Chih Ch'eng to go and look for them. At that moment Ch'en Yen came in, and Fang Te asked if he had seen anything of his guest.

"Yes, sir," said the steward; "I met him just now with

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Lu Hsin at the west gate of the city. They said that there was a visit to be made somewhere, and I lent him two horses that I had with me for his servants to ride. Wang T'ai was with them, too, and the five of them rode off as quickly as clouds driven by the wind! They seemed to be in a great hurry about something."

On hearing this, Fang Te guessed immediately that Lu Hsin must have overheard his plot and told Li Mien about it, and he groaned within himself. But he asked no further questions and turned about and went back into the inner court to tell his wife what had happened. The latter, when she heard that they had made their escape, started with surprise.

"Then it is all over," she exclaimed, "and our fate will overtake us the more quickly!" And Fang Te, seeing that his wife had lost her self-possession, became so agitated that his hands and feet found no repose.

"We cannot yet be sure what he will do!" he said, and then, in his desire to put the blame on someone other than himself, he added: "But all this trouble is solely the result of your loud and excessive talking!"

"Well, it is done now, and cannot be helped," she answered. "It is no good your becoming so excited! The matter is beyond discussion; we must act! They cannot have gone far. Quickly get together a few trusty men and pursue them through the night; catch them up and slay them all like robbers! Then there will at last be an end of all this!"

So her husband called Ch'en Yen and laid the scheme before him; but the steward emphatically refused to agree to the proposal.

"No, no!" he said. "My feet will only walk along the straight path. Assassination is not at all agreeable to me! And, besides, if a call for rescue is raised, and they get help, as is quite likely, it is just possible that we shall lose our own lives! Now I have a much better plan than that, which

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will not necessitate the movement of a band of men, and they will not be able to get away!"

"And what is that?" asked Fang Te, well pleased.

"Well, next door to my house, sir," replied Ch'en Yen, "is one which was occupied a month ago by a very peculiar man. I do not know his name, and he appears to have no trade. But I noticed that he used to go out every day and always come back intoxicated at night. I thought him rather an uncanny person, and his doings most mysterious. From curiosity I tried to find out about him several times, but could ascertain nothing until one day a wealthy stranger came to visit him. The visitor wore a black official hat and a coat of brocade and came on horseback with a large retinue. He entered the house of this man of whom I speak and stayed there three days. I made secret inquiries of the servants as to the names of both host and guest, but could elicit nothing from them until one of them whispered to me that my neighbour was a dealer in black art, who had a magic sword which he was able to project to a distance and with which he could decapitate people! He could make it do this even up to a distance of a hundred *li*, and all in a moment of time! The servant also said that this magician was a man of great rectitude of character, and that recently at Lin An he had avenged a great injury done to another by killing the offender in this manner in broad daylight, and that he had come here to stay until the affair had blown over. I suggest, sir, that you get ready some fitting gift and go and visit him! You need only say that Li Mien has done you a great injury and beg him to avenge it, and if he agrees and does what you ask there will be an end to this matter!"

Now while this interview was going on, Pei Shih had been listening behind a screen, and when Ch'en Yen had finished speaking she came out.

"That is really a most satisfactory plan," she said. "Quickly go and beg the man to help us!"

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"How much shall I give him as a present?" was her husband's next question.

"This man is famous for his uprightness," replied Ch'en Yen. "He is more likely to help you if you have right on your side than if you give him a large present! If you take three hundred taels of silver, sir, it will be quite sufficient."

Pei Shih was all the more eager when she heard that it could be done so cheaply, and quickly got together the required sum. It was now getting dusk and Fang Te hurriedly removed his official clothes and put on the garments of a private person, and then in company with Ch'en Yen and Chih Ch'eng set forth on his errand. They went on foot and with as little ostentation as possible to Ch'en Yen's house, next door to which lived the mysterious stranger. The lane was a very lonely one and contained only four or five houses altogether, so they met no one on the way. On arrival at Ch'en Yen's house they entered, and Fang Te sat down while Ch'en Yen lit a lamp and went round to see if his neighbour was at home. And, as he went out, he saw the man coming home, as usual, in a state of intoxication. So he went back and told Fang Te.

"It would be just as well, sir," he said, "if you would have whatever you wish to say all ready in set phrases; and you had better kneel before him when you address him; that will help to persuade him!"

Fang Te said that he understood and they then went out and stood before the man's door and knocked lightly twice. The man at once opened the door and looked out to see who it was, whereat Ch'en Yen said to him in a low voice: "The magistrate of this district wishes to pay his respects to the Benevolent Sage!"

"There is no such person here!" returned the man, and was on the point of shutting the door in their faces when Ch'en Yen spoke again. "Please do not shut us out!" he said, "for there is something else I have to say."

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"But I am on the point of retiring for the night," answered the man. "Who is it that thus importunes me? Should you or he have any business with me, come to-morrow!"

"Sir," said Fang Te, stepping forward, "my business is short, and I shall keep you but a very few moments."

"What have you to say?" asked the man. "You had better come inside to say it!"

The three then followed him into the house, and he closed the door after them. The house was a single-storied building, and he led them into a tiny room which was evidently the reception chamber; and there Fang Te knelt down before the unknown.

"I was unaware," he said, "that the Benevolent Sage had come into my district, and this accounts for my lack of courtesy in not coming before to pay my respects! Only to-day have I been so fortunate as to realize my ambition in that direction, but that I have now done so will be a source of satisfaction to me as long as I shall live!"

"You, sir, are the magistrate," replied the man, as he raised Fang Te to his feet. "Why are you so excessively polite? Such behaviour is surely a loss of 'face.' Moreover, I am no 'Benevolent Sage.' You must be under some delusion!"

"I have come specially to beg of you to exert your powers to help me," said Fang Te, "and I am satisfied that I am under no delusion! Here I have," and he motioned to Ch'en Yen and Chih Ch'eng to display the silver that he had brought, "a small offering which maybe will keep you in wine for a short while. I trust that you will accept it, even though the insignificance of the amount may cause you to smile!"

"I am," replied the other with a laugh, "a wastrel of obscure origin. My home is bounded by the four seas. I possess not the slightest ability in any direction! How, then, can I permit you to address me as 'Benevolent Sage'? With

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reference to your present, it is of no use to me, and I beg of you to remove it without further parley."

At this Fang Te again bowed low before him. "My present is but a very small one, I must confess," he said, "but it is nevertheless a sign of my intense respect for you, sir, and I implore you not to refuse it!"

"You come here without warning, sir," answered the man, "and bow down before a common individual like myself, and bring in addition a valuable present! Why is this?"

"Oh, Benevolent Sage, first accept my present," begged Fang Te, "and then I shall be in a position to state my business!"

"Although I am a poor man," was the reply, "I will most certainly not accept presents without proper cause. If you do not tell me clearly what you want, I will by no means accept your gift!"

Fang Te then pretended to weep, and, bowing himself again to the ground, spoke as follows:

"My name is Fang. I have borne upon my shoulders an intolerable burden of wrong for a great while! To-day my aggressor stood before me, but I had no means of whitening my grievance. I have a special admiration for you, sir, as one characterized by benevolence and a model of what a man should be; you are indeed worthy to rank with Nieh Cheng and Ching Ko! (Note 38). And so, with gall as big as a bushel measure, I come to bow before you to-day and pray that you will right the wrong that oppresses my soul (for you have ability to do so by exerting only one-half of your wonderful power!) and slay my dastardly enemy! And if you will do this, I shall never, alive or dead, be able to forget your virtuous act!"

"You are under a delusion, sir," replied the unknown, waving his hand in deprecation; "I have not even the means of providing myself with the necessaries of life. How, then, can I undertake such difficult feats for others? Moreover, assassination is no light matter, and if anyone were to over-

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hear our conversation at this present time, both of us would be involved in serious consequences. I beg of you to return home without delay!" And so saying, he rose and made as if to conduct his guest to the door, but Fang Te reached out and grasped him by the sleeve.

"I have heard," he pleaded, "that you are ever sympathetic and benevolent and are specially skilled in eliminating criminals and in wiping out the foes of mankind, thus assisting those in trouble and relieving the oppressed, after the manner of the sages and worthies of ancient days! To-day I cherish a mighty grievance which oppresses me, and if you, O Benevolent Sage, refuse to aid me, I fear that I shall remain always unavenged." And, so saying, he again pretended to break out into passionate weeping.

The other was deceived by the magistrate's attitude and thought that his grief was real. "If you in very truth have a grievance, sir——" he began, but Fang Te interrupted him.

"If I had not really a grievance, sir," he exclaimed, "how could I dare to come and supplicate you?"

"In that case," replied the unknown stranger, "please be seated and relate the details of your grievance to me, giving me full particulars as to the name and present whereabouts of your aggressor. If I can help you I will do so, and if I cannot help, there will be an end of the matter!"

The two then sat down opposite one another, while Ch'en Yen and Chih Ch'eng stood at the side; and Fang Te related the following lying tale. He said that Li Mien in former years had falsely accused him in court of being a robber and had tortured him in a hundred cruel ways to make him confess; that he had thrown him into prison and many times had ordered the gaoler, Wang T'ai, to kill him secretly; but that, owing to the fact that his friends outside had got to hear of it, Li Mien had not dared actually to kill him. He said that by sheer good luck it had happened that Li Mien had been superseded by a magistrate who had held a re-

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hearing of the case and that then he had at last been set free and had subsequently arrived at his present dignity.

"To-day," he went on, "this man Li Mien came, together with Wang T'ai, to levy blackmail on me, demanding a thousand taels of silver. I paid him, but he was still unsatisfied, and then, in conspiracy with one of my own servants, he plotted secretly to kill me, but luckily I was able to get wind of it in good time. Li Mien then fled away with this servant of mine, and they are now on the way to Ch'ang Shan, where Li Mien will incite Prefect Yen to cause my ruin!"

Such was the terrible tale that he fabricated, and when the other heard it he became very angry.

"If indeed you have been thus so basely wronged," he said, "I could not rest until you have been avenged! Go back now to your yamen. The responsibility is now upon my shoulders, and this very night the road to Ch'ang Shan will be searched for these rascals and they shall be punished fittingly and your wrong shall be duly avenged! By midnight I will come to you and report my doings!"

"I am indeed grateful to you, O Benevolent Sage," said Fang Te earnestly, "for your extraordinary kindness. I will now return and will wait up with a lantern for your arrival, and when the good deed is done I will reward you very handsomely!"

The other made a gesture of impatience and deprecation. "When I see injustice," he said, "I draw my sword and do my best to right the wrong. And what I do is done without thought of reward. This present of yours, I refuse to accept!" And even as he spoke he glided out of the room as though blown away by the wind and disappeared mysteriously!

Fang Te and the others were startled beyond measure and remained staring, their mouths open in astonishment.

"He is obviously a magician," said Fang Te, "without any pretence! But gather up the silver and I will send it to him later when I get an opportunity!"

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The situation is summed up in the following quatrain:

"A magic sword is used to right a wrong,
A handsome gift of money is refused,
Who would believe a bad man's lying tongue
A friend so falsely could have thus accused!"

VIII

Now Wang T'ai and his two fellow-servants, when they saw that their master was going out of the city without any attempt to make the call of which there had been so much talk, but that the only concern appeared to be to get away as quickly as possible, were surprised beyond measure. In a twinkling they had put thirty *li* behind them. It was now growing dusk, and there was no word of finding an inn to pass the night in. But the moon was thirteen days old, and she hung in the sky like a great wheel as the sun went down; so taking advantage of her bright beams they gave no heed as to whether the road was good or bad, but galloped onwards, regardless of life or limb. The only thing that Li Mien seemed to fear was pursuit, for they fled onwards, ever onwards, and no word passed between them.

It was about the end of the second watch, and they had covered some eighty *li*, when they arrived at a market town in the district of Ching Ching Hsien. By this time both beasts and riders were tired out.

"We have come a long way," said Lu Hsin, "and there should now be no danger. Had we not better now look for a lodging so that we can rest, and then to-morrow we can again make an early start?" To this Li Mien agreed, and he led the way to search for an inn. But it was already quite late, and all doors were shut up for the night. It seemed that they would search in vain for a lodging, but at last, when they had come nearly to the end of the main street leading through the town, they found an inn which was still open. They all dismounted and went into the inn yard, where their

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first act was to take the saddles off their steeds, and then, tying the beasts up to the mangers, they gave them a good feed.

Lu Hsin then asked the landlord to give them a decent and clean room for the night. "Gentlemen," said the host, "I will not deceive you! There is no part of my inn that is not perfectly clean and decent, but there is, at the present moment, only one room unoccupied!" And so saying he led the way thither, and Li Mien went in and sat down on a wooden bench, for he was tired out and still breathless with his rapid ride.

He emitted sigh after sigh, and Wang T'ai was now no longer able to restrain his questions.

"Magistrate Fang," he said, "was most anxious to keep us! To-morrow he was going to provide us with an escort, and we should have journeyed slowly and comfortably. How nice that would have been; To-day we have discarded even our baggage, and we might be refugees from the way in which we have come galloping through the night, at the cost of so much hardship and fatigue! And Mr Lu has also come with us! I pray you to tell us, sir, what is the meaning of it all?"

"Yes, indeed; what can you know of all our difficulties?" replied Li Mien. "If it had not been for Mr Lu here, you and I by this time would have been killed and our bodies thrown aside as carrion! But by good luck we have escaped from the maw of the tiger, thanks be to heaven! Thus it was that no thought was taken either for luggage or fatigue."

Wang T'ai, alarmed and surprised at this, asked how such a thing was possible, and Li Mien was just about to begin to tell him all about it when the landlord came in also. He had seen that the five of them had come dashing along on horseback through the night with no vestige of baggage, and he suspected that they were evildoers, so he came to inquire as to their antecedents.

"What, may I ask, my masters, is your occupation?"

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said he; "and where are you from that you arrive here at this hour?"

Li Mien's heart was so full of wrath and indignation that he could hardly reply, but he was fain to answer the host's question.

"It is indeed a long story!" he said. "But sit down, sir, and let me tell you all." And he related the tale of Fang Te's crime, of his own compassion on his unusual appearance, how Wang T'ai had contrived his escape and how he himself had been cashiered in consequence. He told how he had met Fang Te by accident and had been detained and lavishly entertained in the yamen. He explained how Fang Te had that very day gone in to see his wife, who had made him listen to her evil counsel and her murderous plot, and how, thanks to Lu Hsin having overheard and disclosed this, they had been able to get away with their lives.

All this he told in detail, and as Wang T'ai listened he kept cursing Fang Te all the time for an ungrateful scoundrel. The landlord, too, did not spare his sighs of sympathy and his ejaculations of disgust. When the narration was finished Lu Hsin pointed out to him that his master was worn out and requested that food and wine of the best should be brought for them immediately, so that they should eat and then sleep in preparation for an early resumption of their journey on the following day. The host agreed and left the room.

Immediately afterwards they were all astounded to see a huge man suddenly appear from under one of the beds and rise up before them! He was girded up and dressed as though for a desperate encounter, and carried a long sword in his hand. His manner was both threatening and terrible as if he had come bent on slaughter.

Li Mien and his servants were so alarmed at this apparition that their wits nearly left them, and they all knelt before the man as they supplicated him to spare their lives. But the man raised Li Mien from the floor. "Have no fear!"

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he said, " but listen to what I say! I am a Benevolent Sage, who makes it his life's work to right what is wrong and to kill all malefactors! Fang Te has concocted a lying story about you to the effect that it was you who had plotted to kill *him!* He begged me to come and slay his aggressor. And who could have guessed that he himself is the scoundrel, that his heart is that of a wolf, that his lungs are those of a cur and that he has outraged the name of decency and benevolence! It is indeed lucky that you, sir, told your story as you did! Had you not done so, it is likely that you would all have been killed by mistake, good men as you are! "

Li Mien and the rest ko-towed again at this speech. " Our gratitude is due to you, Benevolent Sage," they said, " for sparing our lives! " And again the man raised up Li Mien from the ground.

" No thanks are due to me," he said. " I will now withdraw myself for a short while. But I will soon return! "

And going out through the door into the courtyard he floated up off the ground and above the eaves of the house, and soaring up like a bird he disappeared in a moment!

Li Mien and his servants were all terribly alarmed and their tongues emerged so far that they seemed in danger of being unable to withdraw them again. For they were unable to tell what would be the intentions of the man when he returned. So they remained at their wits' end from apprehension, not daring either to lie down and rest or even to take a mouthful of food or wine. Here is a verse to sum up the situation:

" Breathless after their headlong flight, their narrow escape they made,
When all on a sudden from under the bed appears a terrible blade!
And now their harrowing story is told, with all its details bared,
And the awful stranger awakes to the truth and their lives are happily spared! "

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IX

Meanwhile, when Pei Shih in the yamen saw her husband return with his errand apparently accomplished and bringing back his present intact, she rejoiced exceedingly and her face became suffused with smiles. She hastily prepared supper and laid the table, and husband and wife sat down to wait by lamplight for the Benevolent Sage, Ch'en Yen also remaining near at hand to attend to their needs.

About the third watch they suddenly heard sounds of alarm from the birds roosting under the eaves outside, and the rustling of leaves falling from the trees. Soon afterwards a man strode over the door-sill into the room. Fang Te looked up, and there before his eyes was the Benevolent Sage! He was attired like a god and presented but little resemblance to his former appearance. Not knowing whether to be alarmed or pleased, the pair advanced to greet him. But the man showed no signs either of politeness or of cordiality, but strode angrily into the middle of the room and sat down on a chair.

Fang Te and his wife knelt before him and ko-towed to express their thanks. They were just about to ask him how he had fared when the Sage, with a very angry look at them, whipped out his great sword with a hiss, and pointing it at them addressed Fang Te.

"Black-hearted thief that you are! Magistrate Li was the virtuous man who saved *your* life; of his kindness you were altogether forgetful. You listened to the evil words of this woman, and, turning your back upon your benefactor's virtue, you planned his undoing! When your cruel plot was revealed he fled. Then it was that you should have realized your crime and repented. But, on the contrary, heaping infamy upon infamy, you concocted a dastardly and lying story to deceive me into undertaking his murder! Had he not happened to tell the true tale in my hearing, even I would have been hoodwinked and would have been

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involved in your plot! You deserve to be sliced up into ten thousand fragments! Only then would my anger be wholly appeased!"

And before Fang Te had had time to make any excuse, his head had been smitten from his shoulders and had fallen to the ground! Pei Shih collapsed in a heap, half dead with terror. She had never before in her life been at a loss for words, but now her heart and her gall were shrivelled up, and she lay there as though glued to the floor, unable to move.

Pointing his sword at her the Benevolent Sage roared: "Dog's dam! Vile and worthless object! Not content with abstaining from exhorting your husband to virtue, you enticed him to compass the death of his benefactor! Now I shall see of what fashion are your liver and lungs!" Then leaping to his feet he kicked her body over, and, placing his left foot on her hair and his right foot on her knees, held her firmly down. She managed to gasp out: "Oh, Benevolent Sage, spare my life!" But the only reply was: "Vicious and miserable woman! No mercy will be shown to you, for you had no pity upon others!"

The man then gave one slash with his sword, ripping her up completely. Then, holding the dripping blade between his teeth, he tore out her entrails with both hands! The blood ran through his fingers as he carried the gory mass to the light and examined it. "I should have thought," he muttered to himself, "that such a vile woman as that would hardly have had the entrails of a human being; I am surprised to find that she has! How then could she have concocted so poisonous a plan?"

Then, flinging the mass on the floor, he decapitated her corpse, and, after tying the two heads together, he put them in a leather bag that he carried; then he wiped the blood from his hands and sheathed his sword. Next, shouldering the bag, he strode out of the room into the courtyard, and, leaping over the great wall, he disappeared.

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"The benevolent gall of this wonderful man both heaven and earth could enfold,
And both devils and gods would have trembled with fright at his strength and his daring untold!"

X

Meanwhile Li Mien and his party, master and servants, waited in the inn until the fifth watch, when suddenly they saw a gleam of light in the courtyard. They were all startled and got up to see what it was, and lo! it was the Benevolent Sage back again! He came in and deposited a large leather bag on the floor. "The black-hearted thieves have been cut off by me," he said; "here are their heads!" And as he spoke he shook the two human heads out of his bag. Li Mien was both alarmed and pleased, and kneeling down he ko-towed and said: "Your benevolence, sir, is extreme, and hardly to be paralleled among the worthies of ancient days. Tell me, please, your name, that I may attempt to repay you!"

"I have no name," the other replied with a laugh, "and require no gratitude or recompense; but since I appeared before you by emerging from beneath a bed, you may address me, if we ever meet again, as 'The Benevolent Sage from under the Bed.'" So saying, he took out a small packet of some drug from the folds of his jacket, and, scooping some of this drug up with the nail of his little finger, he sprinkled it on the two heads as they lay on the floor, taking care, however, that it should fall on the raw surface of the necks. Then he raised one hand in salute and soared up and disappeared as before above the roof. They could neither stop him nor see where he had gone.

Li Mien looked at the two heads which the man had left on the floor and felt rather apprehensive about them, not knowing what he should do. But as he looked, strange to

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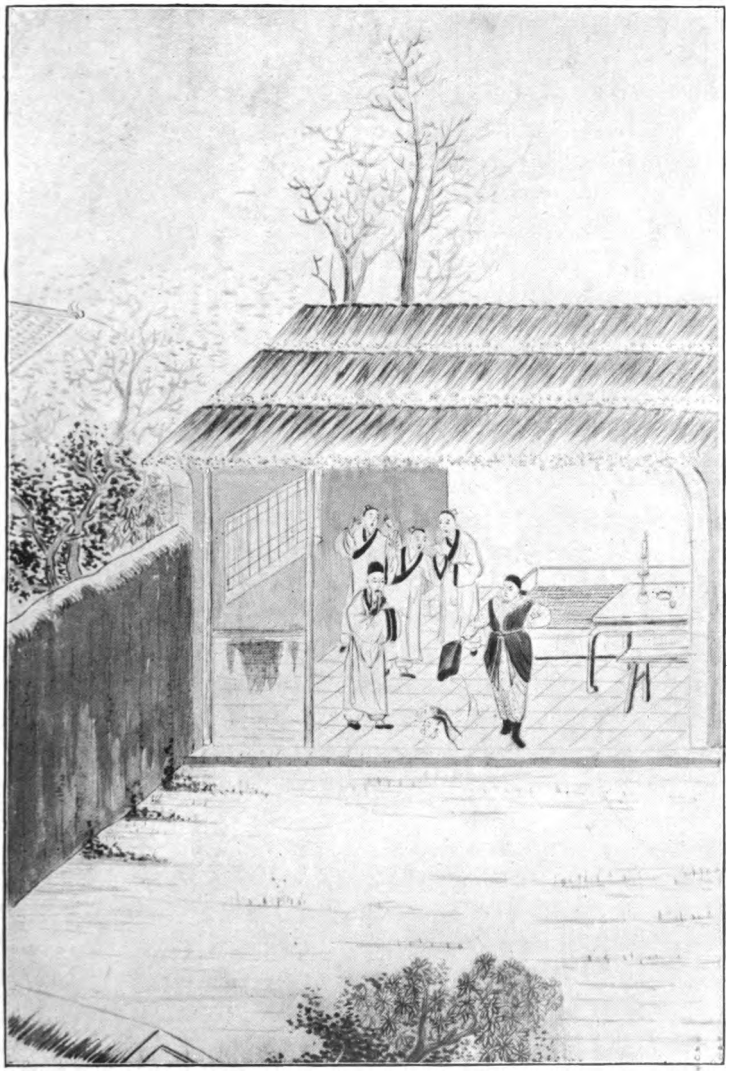

The Benevolent Sage shook two heads out of his bag

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say, he saw them gradually diminishing in size till at last they disappeared altogether and only a little pool of clear water remained. At this he felt greatly relieved.

When daylight came he instructed Lu Hsin to go out and pay the landlord. Then mounting their horses they again set forth on their way, and after two more days they reached Ch'ang Shan. They went straight to the Prefect's yamen, and Li Mien paid his respects to Prefect Yen. The faces of the two old friends expanded with joy when they beheld one another again and the Prefect insisted on keeping his friend to stay in the yamen. He thought that it was strange that the latter had brought no luggage, and when he asked the reason, Li Mien told him the whole of his strange story, which was confirmed two days later when the official report of the murder of the Pai Hsiang magistrate and his wife was duly forwarded.

It appeared that on the night in question Ch'en Yen and Chih Ch'eng and several other of the servants, having become aware of the terrible deed of the Benevolent Sage, fled in all directions, screaming with terror, and hid themselves, not daring to put their heads out until daybreak. They then entered the room, to find the two headless corpses lying in pools of blood, the entrails of the woman lying to one side and their heads nowhere to be found. The table utensils and ornaments in the room had not been disturbed and not one was missing. Their consternation uprose to heaven and they went and reported the matter to the subordinate officials, who were filled with horror at what they heard.

An official inquiry was held at once into all ascertainable circumstances, and Ch'en Yen had to confess all about Fang Te wishing to kill Li Mien and imploring another to carry out the deed. The sub-magistrate then called up all the retainers in the yamen, and marshalling them, together with their weapons, he marched them off, with Ch'en Yen as their guide, to arrest the murderer. By that time the whole story was noised abroad, and a large crowd followed the posse to

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see what there was to be seen. And they filed along the lonely lane and broke open the premises of the myterious stranger, but they found nothing except empty rooms and there was no sign of any living thing. So the officials composed their report on the matter.

They knew that Li Mien was a great friend of Prefect Yen, and they thought that if they reported the whole truth it might be that trouble might result. Moreover, the entire truth would have shown their late magistrate to have been sadly deficient in virtue. So they suppressed most of the details and confined their statement to a brief account of how robbers had entered the yamen at midnight and had murdered the magistrate and his wife and had cut their heads off; and they added that there was no possibility of making any arrest. No mention was made of the quarrel between Li Mien and Fang Te. And, having sent off their report, they procured coffins and put away the corpses.

Prefect Yen duly submitted this report to his superiors. At that time the whole of the district north of the Yellow River was ruled by An Lu-shan, and when he heard of the death of Fang Te, one of his own minions, he sent a reply to the report instructing that every effort was to be made to arrest the murderer. And when Li Mien heard this he became apprehensive that he might be implicated in the matter, so he left the Prefect's hospitable roof and returned to his home in Ch'ang An. Now it happened by good fortune that just at that time Wang Hung the Governor was deprived of his rank and cast into prison and so all the officials who had been cashiered by his advice were reinstated in office. Accordingly Li Mien obtained his original appointment back again and less than six months afterwards he was promoted to a Censorship.

One day when he was out with his retinue in the streets of the capital, he saw a man in a red coat riding a white horse with two servants following him. This man became entangled in Li Mien's procession of retainers, in

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spite of the fact that they tried to turn him aside. Li Mien looked to see the cause of the confusion, and to his astonishment he recognized the man as the " Benevolent Sage from under the Bed." He alighted from his horse, and bowing to the man asked if he had enjoyed good health since they had last met. The man expressed himself as fortunate that Li Mien had recognized him, whereat Li Mien said that he had never forgotten his help and his kindness of by-gone days, and could not possibly have failed to remember him. He then asked him to accompany him to his yamen.

" I will come some other day," replied the other, " and pay my respects to you. To-day I cannot do as you command me, but if your Excellency does not think me beneath your notice, will you not now come to my humble abode for a little chat?"

Li Mien willingly agreed, and, getting on his horse once more, followed the Sage. They went down the Street of Chief Joys and then turned in at a small door. They passed through several doorways and suddenly Li Mien saw before him a large building rising up with roofs and halls apparently reaching up to the clouds. Servants, of whom there appeared to be several hundreds, came forward to receive them, and Li Mien remarked to himself that there was no doubt about the Sage being a veritable magician.

He was then ushered into the reception hall, where they greeted each other with ceremony, and host and guest took their seats as formality demanded. Then in a twinkling a feast was laid before them of a magnificence exceeding that to be found in the palaces of princes. And an orchestra composed of ladies of remarkable beauty made continually the most exquisite music outside.

" This is but a poor meal, I fear," said the Benevolent Sage; " got ready without fitting preparation and quite unworthy of a great official! Kindly forgive my lack of respect." Li Mien expressed his thanks at length and in a suitable manner and the two sat long together discussing the

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heroic deeds of olden days. It was late at night before they parted.

Next day Li Mien prepared a present and came again to pay a formal call on his host, but he could find nothing save a small empty house and could obtain no clue as to where the magnificent palace was. So, sighing with astonishment, he returned home.

Subsequently Li Mien attained the rank of Minister of the Grand Council and was given the title of Duke of Ch'ien.

Wang T'ai and Lu Hsin also attained to subordinate official positions.

" ' Good for Good and Ill for Ill,' the ancient canon reads,
And shame on him who has repaid kind acts by evil deeds!
But he, who like this wondrous Sage, will right another's wrong,
Forever will be famed alike in story and in song! "

NOTES

Note 24.—*Vide* notes 13 and 16, *ante*.

Note 25.—A square-faced man is a handsome man in China. Large ears portend good luck, especially in the matter of long life.

Note 26.—It is a common belief in China that the fortunes of all are predestined and that everyone has his allotted portion of good luck, which he is bound to meet sooner or later, quite irrespective of any personal effort.

Note 27.—In T'ang times every man had to wear white robes of cotton before he passed the first literary examination and attained the degree of Hsiu-ts'ai (B.A.). See note 56 *infra*.

Note 28.—Gunpowder was not used in China until the Yuan Dynasty, some 500 years after the time of this story. That it, or something like it, was used for incendiary purposes for many years before the Yuan Dynasty is, however, well known.

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Note 29.—According to the old law, no one might be punished for a criminal offence unless he confessed his guilt. It is obvious, therefore, that if a prisoner could be made to confess by application of torture, it would save much time in court.

A parallel for the grim humour of the names given to the tortures enumerated in the foregoing verse may be found in mediaeval Europe.

Note 30.—*The cangue:* a heavy square wooden board locked round the neck of a criminal.

Note 31.—An Lu-shan, who began life as explained in the previous story, rose subsequently to great favour with the Emperor, who employed him in the repression of the raids of the Tartars. In this An was so successful that he was ennobled as a Duke. This doubtless gave him an undue idea of his own importance, for he rebelled against his patron and was for some time entirely successful. He caused the emperor to flee to Szechuen and proclaimed himself the first of a new dynasty. The rebellion was at last, however, crushed and An was eventually assassinated by his own son.

Note 32.—An official yamen of the old type consists of a series of groups of buildings, each group arranged round a rectangular court-yard, the whole being surrounded by a high wall. The only gate is at the south end, which is invariably the front.

At the north end, the innermost group of buildings form the private house of the official. Here he lives with his family, and his office, reception rooms, etc., etc., are all farther to the south. The office staff and servants do not as a rule enter the private court-yard, and the official's exit from his house into the official part of the compound is usually signalled by striking a gong.

There is generally a very small and strongly built door in the north wall, out of which the family may escape in the event of riot, etc.

Note 33.—The pictures, of course, being kept rolled up.

Note 34.—An allusion to a certain Ning Hsiang-ju, of the third century B.C. He was sent with a message of warning to the Prince of Ch'in, who threatened to immerse him in a cauldron of boiling oil if the message which he brought were not of a conciliatory character. Thus menaced, Ning looked around, and found his retreat cut off by an executioner. Undaunted, however, he delivered himself of his original message, and the prince was so impressed by his unswerving devotion to duty, that he released him unharmed.

Note 35.—Only at very informal meals can two people sit at opposite sides of the table. For a host to sit opposite his guest implies that the latter is his inferior. When there is only one guest, he should, according to etiquette, sit facing the south (*cf.* Note No. 8), while the host should sit facing the west, *i.e.* with the guest on his left hand.

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Note 36.—The gall-bladder, according to Chinese ideas, is the seat of boldness. There is, in Chinese colloquial, no exact equivalent for our word "courage," and the nearest equivalent expression is usually employed to mean "boldness" in a derogatory sense.

The hero of a Chinese story is frequently represented (as indeed in the present tale) as being too terrified to utter a word, there being nothing damaging in such a confession, according to Chinese ideas.

Note 37.—*Su Chin:* a worthy of the third century B.C., who was stimulated to such energy by the refusal of his friends to relieve his distress that his efforts were crowned with success and he rose to great eminence in the state.

Note 38.—*Nieh Cheng and Ching Ko:* Two patriots of old, who used to undertake the assassination of unpopular leaders in order to further the projects of their rivals.

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THE JUDGMENT OF MAGISTRATE T'ENG

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THE JUDGMENT OF MAGISTRATE T'ENG

I

"A good man, conscience-led, in Virtue's path will always walk,
An evil man will rather heed his neighbours' empty talk!"

In the days of the Emperor Yung Lo,* there lived in the Shun T'ien district a Prefect whose name was Ni Shou-lien. He came of a well-to-do family and owned fat lands and a fine house. In his youth he had married a daughter of the Ch'en family, who had borne him an only son, whose name was Shan-chi, and after this boy had grown up and was married in his turn, the mother died and Prefect Ni resigned from office and retired into private life.

The Prefect was then seventy-nine years of age, but he remained very hale and well, and retained complete control of his estate, being by no means content to enjoy a leisured ease.

One day Ni Shan-chi came to his father and said: "Men of over seventy years are exceptional. You, my father, are now seventy-nine and next year you will be of the ripe age of eighty! How would it be if you were to hand over the management of your affairs to your offspring and allow others to provide for you? Would not that be a good idea?"

But the old man shook his head at his son as he answered him in verse, as follows:

"Sufficient for each day are the labours of the same,
No one should try to reach too high, or over-far to aim!
To provide for all our wants I am laying money by,
And shall do so till both my feet are pointing to the sky,
And then to govern my estate your turn will come to try!"

* A.D. 1403-1425.

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Now every year, in the tenth moon, Prefect Ni used to go forth into the villages round to collect his rents in person, staying away for a full month; and the villagers used to bring fat chickens and fine wine for his delectation. This year he went out as usual, and one afternoon, having finished his business for the day, he strolled out from the village where he was lodging, to enjoy the view. And suddenly there met his gaze a young girl, who with an old white-haired woman was washing clothes on a stone in the bed of a stream that flowed by. The girl was clad like any ordinary village maiden, but her bearing and expression had a rare distinction.

"Her hair was black as polished lac or as a raven's wing,
Her eyes were like the wavelets where the sunshine lingers yet,
Her dainty fingers ten were like onion shoots in spring,
Her eyebrows curved delightfully like rounded flakes of jet.
Her clothes by rustic hands were made,
But fairer could she not have looked in silk and satin dressed,
Every movement of her limbs showed her as a peerless queen.
No ornament such beauty needs, no gold or jewel sheen,
A wild-flower hidden in a glade,
Her age, twice eight, was just the time of beauty at its best!"

Prefect Ni suddenly fell passionately in love with her, and stood there staring at her with eyes and mouth wide open. The girl, her washing finished, walked away with her aged companion, the old man following her every movement with his eyes. He saw her pass several houses and enter a humble little gate of plaited reeds, and then he hurriedly turned about and went to interview the village head-man. He told him what he had seen, thus and thus, and ordered

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him to make full inquiries as to the girl's status and antecedents and to find out whether or no a husband had yet been found for her. "If she is not affianced," he said, "I should much like to take her as a concubine, if she would consent."

The head-man was anxious enough to ingratiate himself with his employer, and went off at once upon his errand. He soon ascertained that the girl's surname was Mei, and that her father had gained the degree of "Excelling Talent" at the provincial examinations, but both he and his wife had died young and had left their daughter's up-bringing to the care of her grandmother; the girl was over seventeen years old and had not yet been affianced.

Having elicited these facts, the head-man said to the old woman: "My master thinks that your granddaughter is a neat little person, and has a fancy to take her as his concubine. She is, of course, young, but the old lady, my master's wife, has been dead some years, so she need fear no ill-treatment. And when once the marriage has taken place she will have, I need hardly assure you, as much as she wants of the best of food and clothes. And as for you, my old friend," he went on, "for the rest of your days I shall make it my especial care that in the matter of clothes, tea and rice, you shall have all you need. And when your end comes at last, you shall have a splendid funeral! The only thing that I regret is that your good fortune has come to you so late in life."

These words were as comforting to the old lady as gold-embroidered brocade, and she agreed at once. The marriage-affinity arrangements were adjusted without the slightest difficulty, and the head-man returned to Prefect Ni. The latter was delighted with what he was told and bought at once the betrothal presents. He looked up in the Imperial calendar to find an auspicious day for the ceremony, but he feared lest his son might make himself unpleasant about his projected marriage, and so the wedding was arranged to

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take place in the village, like the betrothal ceremony. And when the wedding came they were indeed an interesting pair, one so old and one so young!

On the third day after the ceremony the wedding chairs were summoned, and the Prefect took his bride home to meet his son and daughter-in-law, who came forward to make their obeisance to their father and call his bride "Little Mother." Prefect Ni distributed presents all round and everybody rejoiced; but his son, Ni Shan-chi, was inwardly very much upset, and, although he said nothing to his father, behind his back he said to his wife: "The old man has indeed done a foolish thing! He ought really to be more responsible. An old bundle of years like that resembles a lighted candle in a draught; he knows that he has but five or ten years more to live, and yet he acts thus unwisely! He links himself to this young flower of a girl, who will in all probability not be able to endure being a wife in name only. There are many similar cases of old men being united to young girls; the brides are always apt to run wild. Her tricks will soon come to light and then there will be a family disgrace! A young wife follows an old husband much as a man leaves his home in time of famine. She will reap her harvest and then she will depart with her arms full! She will always be picking a little here and stealing a little there, concealing her booty as she goes along, while all the time she is pretending to be so very fond of her old husband and ingratiating herself with him merely to get clothes and jewellery out of him. Wait only till the tree falls and then the bird will fly! She will then marry again and go off with a large stock of valuables, which will keep her in comfort ever afterwards. There lies the canker in the tree, the grub amid the grain! Such a state of things would indeed endanger the stability of any household!

"This girl," he went on, "has so many pretty little tricks, she looks to me like a harlot and hardly like a member of any respectable family. She is indeed an adept at posturing and

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imposing on a man, and will have as much evil influence on him as an inauspicious star! She is half concubine and half slave-girl, and it is too humiliating to have to address her by any title of respect. And later on there will be a further concession to be made. Father will insist on everyone calling her 'Little Mother'; he will even want us to call her 'Madam,' as like as not. We cannot endure such a state of affairs; we must indeed be careful not to be too polite to her lest she think too highly of herself. But if we go too far we shall make her angry with us, and to have to endure her spite will indeed be too much!"

Thus the two of them spoke, grumbling together, and all day long there was no end to their talk.

II

Now Prefect Ni was fully aware of their feelings, and though he was highly displeased with his son and daughter-in-law, he concealed his grief within his heart. Luckily his bride was of a most generous disposition and in all she did she was extremely tactful, so that peaceful relations were maintained in the household. In a few months' time an important event in her life began to be foreshadowed, but this was kept from all but the old Prefect. However, one day became three, and three days became nine, and so time slipped by until a full ten months were sped, when, to the astonishment of all the household, a little boy was born. He first saw the light on the ninth day of the ninth moon. so his Milk-name was called "Ch'ung Yang-erh" (Note 39).

Now the eleventh day of the same month happened to be Prefect Ni's eightieth birthday, and people came in crowds to congratulate him. The Prefect prepared a feast for their entertainment to celebrate simultaneously his own eightieth and his newly born son's first birthday. The ceremony of washing the child on his third day of life was gone through, and the guests saluted the old man, saying:

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"Many happy returns of the day to you, sir! That you have had another young gentleman born to you is proof enough of your robust health, undimmed by your advanced years." Prefect Ni was much pleased by these compliments, but his son, Ni Shan-chi, again began saying unpleasant things behind his back.

"At the age of sixty a man loses his vitality as a rule! This is indeed a case of a rotten tree putting forth blossoms! Who knows where this young bastard has come from? There's no blood of my father in him! He shall never be recognized as a brother by me!" And these words were repeated to the old man, who, however, hid them in his heart.

But day and night succeeded each other like arrows, and a whole year had passed before anyone realized it. Ch'ung Yang-erh on the first anniversary of his birth was introduced to the Year Dish (Note 40) and relations and friends again assembled to celebrate the occasion. Ni Shan-chi, however, went out for the day and was not present to help entertain the guests. The old man was well aware of this deliberate act, but did not order his son to return and did alone all the work of entertaining. He was, however, very much displeased although he said no word of reproof. The old adage has it that if a son is filial his father will be magnanimous; but Ni Shan-chi was by nature avaricious and vindictive and he lived in fear lest when the little fellow grew up he should divide the patrimony, so he never consented to recognise him as a brother and continued to spread unpleasant rumours about him, so that he could afterwards have some excuse for casting off both mother and son.

But his father was an official and a scholar, a man of the world, and easily saw what his elder son's intentions were, and he felt very apprehensive when he realized that owing to his advanced age he would hardly live to see Ch-ung Yang come to years of discretion, but would be forced to leave him to the tender mercies of his elder son. He felt that he could not do anything that might increase the enmity between

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the two, and so he forced himself to show forbearance. He saw that the child loved him and that Mei Shih, who was indeed herself little more than a child, was really very fond of him, and as often as he thought over the problem he regretted again and again what he had done.

III

Thus four years passed, and the little fellow was five years old. His father saw that he was a sharp lad and fond of his play, so he thought that he would begin his education and give him his "school-name." The elder son was called Shan-chi (Virtue Uninterrupted), so he called the younger boy Shan-shu, or Virtue Manifested. Then, choosing an auspicious day, he got out some good wine and took the boy to pay his respects to his teacher. Now this man was the teacher that Prefect Ni had engaged to teach his grandson at home, and his idea was that the little uncle and his nephew could study together, both thus gaining advantage. But Ni Shan-chi was by no means of the same mind as his father, and when he heard that his step-brother had been called Shan-shu and was therefore considered as his equal, it did not at all meet with his views; and rather than that his son should study with the lad, thus calling him "uncle" and getting accustomed to the relationship from the beginning, so that Shan-shu could treat him afterwards as an inferior, he preferred to interrupt his son's studies and find another teacher for him. So he refused to allow his son to go to the class-room, but said that he was ill, and for days did not allow him to get instruction. Prefect Ni at first thought that his grandson was really indisposed, but one day the teacher said to him: "I hear that your elder son has engaged another instructor for your grandson and wishes him to be taught alone; I do not quite understand why."

Prefect Ni did not at first give much heed to this, nor did he feel particularly angry about it. Indeed he was about

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to send for his son and question him as to his reasons for so doing, but he reflected that after all this rebellious son of his had been sent him by Heaven and that probably nothing would be gained by talking, so he dropped the matter, and with his mind full of misgiving he made his way back to his own study.

As he went in he accidentally stumbled over the door-sill and measured his length on the floor. Mei Shih in an agony of fright ran to raise him up and supported him to the sofa, where he reclined, unconscious. A doctor was summoned to see him and said that he had had a stroke of apoplexy, and, after giving him a decoction of ginger to revive him, put the patient to bed.

Prefect Ni, though still cheerful, was quite unable to move and could not even hold anything in his hands. Mei Shih sat by his bedside and prepared his food and medicine, diligently attending upon him. But after several successive doses of medicine had been taken no improvement could be noted, and the doctor, after feeling his pulses (Note 41), said ominously: "There is nothing further that I can do; we must wait for a few days; a complete cure cannot be guaranteed!"

This was reported to Ni Shan-chi, who came several times to ascertain the state of the patient; and when he realized that his father would probably not recover he completely lost control of himself and began shouting out orders as a gambler shouts the value of his throws in a gaming-house, beating and abusing the servants and assuming, in a word, the demeanour of the owner of a large establishment, which greatly disturbed the old man when he heard of it.

Mei Shih sat continually at her old husband's side, weeping unceasingly, and her little son did not go to his classroom but remained at home to bear his father company. And the latter, when at last he felt that he was dangerously ill, called his elder son before him and handed to him a book, in which was written a complete account of all his property,

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both houses and land, money and servants, and gave him the following instructions.

"Shan-shu is now five years old; his clothes have still to be provided for him. Mei Shih is still also a mere child and can hardly yet be expected to look after a big household (Note 42). If my estate were to be divided now and half given to her, it would be running certain risks. I now, therefore, hand the whole of my property over to you, and charge you solemnly to behave as though your father were still with you until Shan-shu comes to man's estate. When the time comes, get him a suitable wife, and meanwhile give to him and his mother one of the small houses on the property and 50 or 60 *mu* of land. And, of course, I need not tell you to feed and clothe them properly.

"These directions I have all written out fully in this book. When the time comes for a division of my property to be made, have the deeds properly drawn up. If Mei Shih wishes to marry again, let her do so. If, on the other hand, she decides to remain a widow and to devote her days to her son, again bring no pressure upon her in the matter. After I am dead, obey my injunctions, word for word, and thus be a filial son.

"I now depart to the Nine Springs, and must close my eyes upon this world."

Ni Shan-chi then took the book, and, opening it, he cast a glance over it. He found it to be all clearly written out in full detail, and his face became suffused with smiles of joy. But he quickly controlled himself and said:

"Father, I receive your commands, and will carry them out faithfully and implicitly." Then, hugging the account-book, he hurried out joyfully.

Mei Shih watched him depart, and then, with her eyes streaming with tears, she pointed to her son and said to the dying man: "This little one is your own son; no one can say that he is not of your own flesh and blood. And yet you hand him over to the care of your elder son as though

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he were part of the household furniture! How are we to subsist from day to day, I and the little one?"

"You do not understand," returned her husband. "I know well that Shan-chi is not a trustworthy son, and that if I were now to divide my property equally between you, even the life of this child would be in danger! To hand over everything to him is the better way. Thus he is conciliated and there will be no reason for enmity on his side."

Mei Shih wept again and said: "That may indeed be so, but, according to the old saying, 'no difference should be made between the son of the first wife and the son of a concubine,' and this uneven distribution will make a laughing-stock of us!"

"I am by no means regardless of the claims of your son," said the old man, "but you yourself are only a child, and I have availed myself of this last opportunity of handing over the lad to Shan-chi's care. Wait until I have left the world —at most a year, at least six months. Then try to find a fine young fellow to marry and support you, and thus a means will be provided for your comfort for the rest of your life, and you will not be dependent on *them* for the necessaries of life."

"Such a course," replied Mei Shih, "would never enter my mind! I also am of a family of scholars and gentlemen, and I shall be faithful to your memory to the last! Moreover, there is this little son of yours to be considered; how could I ever inflict so great an injury upon him? No, no, for good or ill I will cleave to him and to him only!" (*Vide* Note 4).

"Are you indeed willing," asked the old man earnestly, "to abide by this resolution? May you not repent of it afterwards!" Whereat Mei Shih swore a great oath that she would never change her mind.

"If in truth you have made up your mind," murmured her husband, "I am indeed anxious about your daily maintenance." And, so saying, he took from under his pillow

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something which he handed over to Mei Shih. She thought at first that it was only another account book, but on looking more closely at it she saw that it was a scroll, rolled up, and about three feet long by a foot wide, and she asked what it was for.

"This," responded the old man feebly, "is a portrait of myself. But it is no ordinary portrait, for there is something magical about it. Take it and conceal it very carefully, showing it to no one at all. But when the boy grows up, if Shan-chi refuses to recognize his rights bear in mind what I tell you now. Wait until an upright and intelligent official is appointed. Then take this scroll to him and go and tell him all about your case. Tell him also that this scroll is my will and ask him to study it very carefully. There will then be a readjustment and at last you will get your rights."

Mei Shih then took the scroll without a word. And the old man lingered on for a few days, till one night his breathing ceased, and when spoken to he did not respond. Alas! he was no more. His age was then 84 years.

"While a little breath is left, man has many ploys;
Death, inconstant, comes at last, where are all his joys?
If he only thought that he leaves everything behind him,
Would he trouble so to fashion all the ties that bind him!"

IV

Now Ni Shan-chi had obtained, as it has been stated, the family account-book, and he took possession of the keys of all the granaries and store-houses and went daily to check over their contents. So how could be possibly find time to go and inquire after his father! In fact he did not actually go round until after the old man had passed away, for then Mei Shih sent a servant to announce the sad news.

At once both Shan-chi and his wife rushed over to where the dead man lay, and sobbed out filial cries of "Oh, Father,

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Father," for a bare two hours or so and then went out again. Mei Shih then repaired to the death chamber and watched by the body. Luckily all the burial clothing and both the inner and the outer coffins were all ready, so that Ni Shan-chi had not to trouble to get them.

When the body had been dressed and placed in the coffin, Mei Shih and her son still remained in the room, crying and wailing dutifully, early and late, and never took a step outside. But Shan-chi did nothing but make out a list of the funeral guests and showed no signs of mourning at all. Inside of forty-nine days he off-handedly fixed the day for the funeral (Note 43). And the same night, after the ceremony, he went to the house in which Mei Shih lived and turned it upside down, opening boxes and drawers to see if she had not perhaps secreted a tael or two of silver belonging to the household. Mei Shih bore this indignity patiently, but she feared that she might lose the portrait that the Prefect had given her, so, placing it at the bottom of one of the two little baskets in which she had originally brought her few belongings to the house when she was married, she opened them ready for inspection and showed that they contained apparently only a few old clothes. So, seeing that she seemed quite willing for them to see what she had, Shan-chi and his wife did not even trouble to look, but contented themselves with turning over again what was in the room and then left her alone. Thereupon Mei Shih gave way to her grief and wept bitterly. And her little son howled in sympathy when he saw his mother so upset.

" Such a sight would draw tears from a statue of stone,
Or would melt the hard heart of a figure of bronze ! "

Early next day Shan-chi called in a builder to look over the house with a view to its being done up to serve as a house for his son when he married. Mei Shih and her son he compelled to go and live in a little three-roomed hut in the back garden, and only allowed her one little bed and a few

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rough chairs and tables. Not one article of decent furniture did she have. As regards servants, she had previously two in her former house. Shan-chi now took the elder one away and gave her only one little slave-girl of eleven or twelve years of age to look after her.

Each day her meals had to be carried over to her from the kitchen, and no one seemed to care whether she and her son got anything to eat or not. Mei Shih thought that this was inconvenient, so she begged rice at intervals from the kitchen and got an old discarded earthenware stove and thus managed to cook her own food. Early and late every day she was sewing and mending in order that she might make a few cash so as to be able to buy what was wanted for their daily needs. The little lad went to a neighbour's house for his schooling, and Mei Shih paid the teacher's salary.

Shan-chi often sent his wife over to try and prevail upon Mei Shih to marry again, and indeed got marriage-brokers to come and make proposals to her. But she swore that she would rather die than do this, so they forebore at last. And she was utterly patient and said no word of complaint, so that Shan-chi, though a savage bully, at last dismissed both mother and son from his mind.

V

Thus days and nights sped past like arrows, and before anyone realized it Shan-shu was fourteen years of age. Now all this time Mei Shih had been very careful never to let fall a word of her sad story to her son, for she feared that he would innocently repeat what he heard and thus cause trouble and harm to them both. He had, however, developed rapidly, and at fourteen he was of great discrimination and intelligence, and it was difficult to keep things from him. One day he came and asked his mother for a silk coat to

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wear and was told that she had no money to buy such a thing.

"My father held the rank of Prefect," said the lad, "and had only two sons. Now I see my brother living in luxury and when I want a coat merely I cannot get one. How is this? If you have no money, I will go and ask my brother for some!" and he turned to go away.

"My son," said Mei Shih, catching hold of his arm to detain him, "a coat is not so great a matter that you should go and beg for one! The proverb says: 'He who does not waste his luck will have it by and by!' If, when you are young, you wear cotton, you may wear satin later on. But if you wear satin when you are young, you may not, when you are old, have even cotton to wear! Wait two years or so more, when you have made more progress with your studies, and then, if you must have a silk coat, I will if necessary even sell myself as a slave in order to get clothes for you to wear. Is your brother the kind of man who can lightly be raised to wrath?"

"You are right, mother," replied Shan-shu. But he was by no means satisfied inwardly.

"My father was a man of great wealth," he thought to himself, "and he would certainly have wished both his sons to share his estate equally. It is not as though I were a step-son in someone else's house or had been born out of wedlock. Why will my brother not recognize me? And my mother! What can be the meaning of her attitude? All this trouble about a piece of silk! And she really talks about selling herself to provide clothes for me! This is indeed a strange business; my brother is not a tiger who eats people!" And with such reflections he formed the resolution of going without his mother's knowledge to see his brother about the matter.

So he went off at once to his brother's house and called him, and when he appeared he saluted him. Shan-chi started when he saw the lad and asked him what he had come for.

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" I am," said Shan-shu, " the son of an official, and yet my clothes are so worn out and ragged that men laugh at me; so I have come to ask you to give me a piece of silk big enough to make me a coat ! "

Shan-chi brusquely answered that he had better ask his mother for what he wanted.

" But father's estate, brother, is all in your hands, not in my mother's," replied the boy.

When Shan-chi heard the word, " estate," his eyes blazed out with anger. " Who incited you," he shouted, " to come to me with such words? You come now to ask for clothes, but I know very well that what you really want is to quarrel with me about the division of the estate ! "

" There will surely," returned Shan-shu, " have to be a division of the estate later on, but to-day all that I have come to ask is, as I have said, a piece of silk in advance to make me look a little more respectable ! "

" You little bastard ! " retorted his brother, " how dare you talk to me about respectability? What if my father's estate was a wealthy one? There are his wife's son and my sons to be considered, and what concern is it of a dirty little spawn like you? Who has put you up to this trick? Do you wish to bring calamity on your own head? I should advise you not to make me lose my temper, or it may be that your mother and you will find yourselves without a roof to cover you ! "

" We are both my father's sons equally," replied Shan-shu. " What can you mean by calling me a bastard? And if I do make you lose your temper, what can you do? Do you think that you can do my mother and myself mischief and then take the whole of the estate for yourself? "

"You vile little wretch ! " shouted Shan-chi, who by this time had completely lost control of himself. " Do you dare to fall foul of me like this? " And, seizing hold of his brother's arm, he beat him on the head with his clenched fist a dozen times until he had bruised him severely.

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Shan-shu then wrenched himself free of his cruel brother's grasp and was off like a puff of smoke, and ran crying to his mother. He told her all that had happened, but Mei Shih rebuked him warmly. "I told you not to do this," she said, "and you would not listen to me; I am very glad that he did beat you!" But as she spoke she wiped his poor bruises with her blue coat, and they both wept together.

"A widow, still of tender years, consoles her orphaned son;
Their food and clothing scanty; comforts lacking every one;
A brother's love is absent quite; thus on one tree there grew
Two branches—one was full of sap, one rotten through and through!"

Mei Shih pondered deeply over the matter, and, being very much afraid of Shan-chi's anger, she sent their slave-girl over to give him a message. "The young scholar," she said, "is not experienced in the world's affairs, and he is very sorry that he made you angry!" But Shan-chi's anger was by no means assuaged by this, and on the following day, early in the morning, he called a number of his relations together and took out his father's will to show them. He then summoned Mei Shih and her son, and thus addressed the assembly: "My elder relations, it is not that I, Shan-chi, am unwilling to look after the mother, here, and her son. Nor do I wish to drive them out. But yesterday Shan-shu came and attempted to pick a quarrel with me about the estate, making me quite afraid of the time when he should come to a full age! Then, I fear, that he will cause me a great deal of trouble. So to-day I intend to hand over to them their share, in your presence, and allow them to live removed from this household and in the East Village. There they will have a house and 58 *mu* of land, as is clearly set forth in my father's will, from which I do not wish to deviate by a hair's-breadth. And I would ask you all to be witness of this!"

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The assembled relatives all knew that Shan-chi was a violent person and had also heard of the terms of the old Prefect's will, and no one of them dared to interfere with a word of remonstrance and thus make trouble with Shan-chi. So all said pleasant things to him and complimented him on his probity. "'A thousand taels will not buy a dead man's pen,'" they said. "If the terms of the will are adhered to, no one could ask more!"

But one or two of them did feel some compassion towards Shan-shu and his mother and said to them: "A sensible man never depends solely upon his patrimony, nor does a woman when she leaves her father's house rely only upon the clothes that she takes with her, for she expects to increase that supply! Numbers of people who begin with nothing at all become possessed of riches subsequently. You already have a house to live in and fields to till, so you have indeed a good start. If you are only industrious you will succeed, and as long as you have a little rice to eat you cannot complain. Every man's fortune is in the hollow of his own hand!"

Mei Shih reflected that after all she had not been at all comfortable in the hut in the garden and that it would be better for her to live apart from the family, wherever it might be. So both she and her son made their obeisance to the assembled company and left the hall, thus parting from Shan-chi and his wife. She told her servant to bring along the few pieces of furniture that she possessed, and she herself carried her two little baskets. Then, hiring a donkey, she rode away with her son.

Thus she came to the East village and saw her new home. But to her dismay she found that the land was all overgrown with weeds, and as to the house, it had not been repaired for many years, so that the tiles had almost all fallen off the roof and the rain came in freely, while the floors were as damp as they could well be! It seemed to her at first impossible for them to live there, but she swept and cleaned

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till she made two of the rooms look fairly presentable and then set up the beds.

She then called a farm hand whom she saw outside and asked him about the land. "It is just about as bad as could be," the man said. "In a good year you will not get more than a half-crop at most, and in bad years you will get nothing and lose the grain that you sow, into the bargain!" And then Mei Shih realized how badly off they were.

And the little scholar, who was a clever lad, said to his mother: "We two brothers are both the sons of our father; what can be the reason for this unequal division of his property? There *must* be some reason for it; that will must be a forgery! The old saying has it: 'In dividing property old and young should share alike.' Mother, why do you not bring a lawsuit against Chan-chi and, good or bad, abide by the magistrate's decision? Then we should have no cause to complain."

So then, at last, Mei Shih told her son the whole story of the past ten years, omitting no detail.

"My son," said she, "do not for a moment doubt but that the will is indeed of your father's own writing. His reason for doing as he has done was that you were young and helpless and he feared that your brother would plan some evil fate for you, so he made over the whole estate to him so that he should be satisfied. But on his deathbed he handed me his portrait, and very seriously gave me to understand that there was something mysterious about it. He instructed me to wait until an upright and clever magistrate should be appointed and then hand it over to him and ask him to study it carefully and read the riddle that it contained. And he said that the result would be that you and I would obtain our rights and suffer no more from poverty."

"Oh, that is how it is!" exclaimed Shan-shu. "Why did you not tell me about it before? Where is the portrait? Do, please, Mother, let me see it at once!"

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So Mei Shih went and opened her basket and took therefrom a cloth package which she unrolled, revealing an object with oiled paper pasted over it. This she undid and took out the scroll, which was three feet long and a foot wide. She pulled it out and hung it over the back of a chair. Then both she and her son knelt before the picture and made their obesiance to it, and Mei Shih, addressing the portrait, said, with the greatest respect: "In this village it is not possible to obtain the candles which we should now place burning before you. I pray that our lack of respect will be pardoned!"

Shan-shu ko-towed again and then, rising to his feet, studied the picture intently. It represented his father sitting on a chair, and wearing his cap of office on his white locks. He held a small child on his left arm and the index finger of his right hand was directed downwards.

Shan-shu puzzled over the picture, which was wonderfully life-like, for a long time, but could make nothing of it, so, as much in the dark as ever, he wrapped it up again as it was before.

VI

Some days afterwards, Shan-shu walked over to a neighbouring village with the idea of making inquiries to see if anyone could tell him of an intelligent official who might possibly be able to solve the mystery of the portrait, and as he drew near to the village temple he met a great crowd of villagers carrying the carcases of a pig and a sheep to be offered at the shrine in sacrifice. He stood there watching, and as he waited a certain old man who was also passing by halted on his staff and stood there likewise to see what was going on. Presently the latter asked someone in the crowd what might be the reason for the sacrifice.

"We had experienced a miscarriage of justice," was the

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answer, "but luckily a very clever official has just been appointed in this district and he settled the difficulty, administering strict justice. We had formerly registered a vow that if we could obtain justice in the matter we would hold a sacrifice to celebrate the event, so to-day we are performing our vow."

"But what was this miscarriage of justice," asked the old man, "and how was the settlement made?" And a man stepped forward out of the crowd and told the following story:

"The former magistrate of this district," he related, "had received orders from the central government to form wards of ten families each, and I was made the head-man of my ward. My name is Ch'eng Ta-t'ung. Now in my village there lived a certain tailor named Chao; the best needle-man he was in the whole place! He would often go to the houses of his clients, in the course of his business, and stay there working all night; sometimes he did not return to his home for days on end. One day he went out and never returned. After a month, his wife, Liu Shih, sent searchers in all directions to look for him, but no trace of him could they find.

"One day, however, the body of a dead man was found in the river, his head all battered in. This was reported to the magistrate, an inquest was held, and the corpse was recognized by the clothes on it to be the body of Chao, the tailor.

"Now it happened, the day before he disappeared, that he had been drinking with me in an inn, and that we had quarrelled about some trifling matter. I lost control of my temper and struck him and then chased him all the way home with a stick! I even went into his house and broke some of the furniture. This I admit. But, to my amazement, his widow accused me, when the body was found, of his murder.

"Mr Ch'i, the former magistrate, would listen only to her

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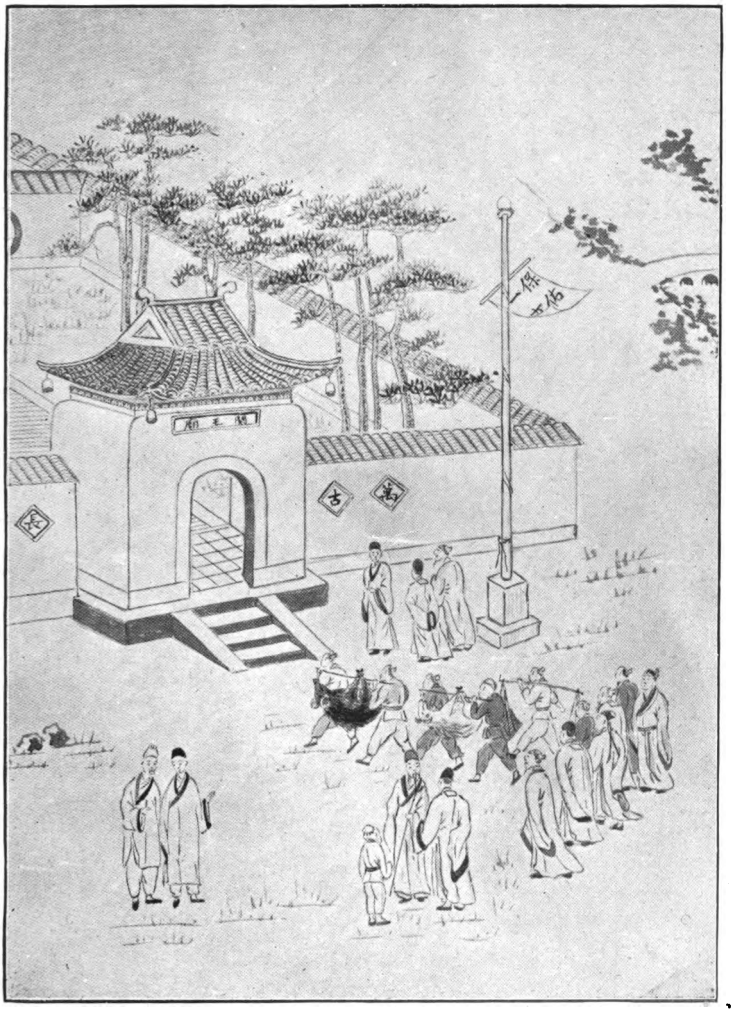

Shan-shu stood there watching

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story and condemned me to death. My ward would not give evidence against me, so they also were held to be to blame, and they got into trouble too. I had no means of giving vent to my grievance and I remained three years in gaol.

" By good fortune, this new magistrate, Mr T'eng, is very clever, though only a Chü Jen (*Vide* Note 56). And when I was about to be taken out for execution, he went again thoroughly into the whole case. I, of course, persisted in my innocence, and he, it seemed, had his doubts from the first.

" ' When men quarrel over their cups,' he said to me, ' there is usually no intent to kill. Why did you murder him? ' and he allowed my appeal for a re-hearing of the whole case. He summoned all the witnesses over again, and as soon as he saw the wife of the dead tailor, he asked her straight out whether she had married again. Liu Shih replied that a poor widow could hardly be expected to remain unmarried, and that she had, indeed, found another husband, also a tailor, named Shen Pa-han. Mr T'eng at once had her second husband arrested and brought before him.

" ' When did you marry this woman? ' he asked him, and was told that the marriage had taken place about a month after Chao's death.

" ' What middle-man was there to arrange the match? ' was the next question, ' and what presents did you make her? '

" ' Chao had borrowed seven or eight taels from me,' Shen replied, ' and when I heard that he was dead, I went round to his house to see if I could collect the debt. I found that Liu Shih had no money but was willing to marry me in satisfaction of her husband's obligation. There was thus no go-between.' Magistrate T'eng then asked him how he, who was only a handicraftsman, could have accumulated seven

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or eight taels which he could spare as a loan, to which Pa-han replied that he had lent the money in instalments.

"The magistrate then handed him a pen and told him to make out a statement, then and there, of the various amounts that he had lent to Chao. So Pa-han made out his statement of the debt, which had been partly in money and partly in rice, in all thirteen loans amounting to seven taels and eight-tenths.

"As soon as Mr T'eng saw the writing he shouted in anger to Pa-han: 'You are the man who murdered Chao, the tailor! How could you allow an innocent man to be accused of your crime?' He then had him put to the torture of having his ankles squeezed, but the fellow wouldn't confess.

"Then Mr T'eng addressed him again. 'I will now give you a proof of your guilt,' he exclaimed angrily, 'to teach you submission! This money was lent out at compound interest; how was it that Chao the tailor was the only man to whom you lent money? It looks to me as though you had had illicit relations with his wife while he was still alive! Chao was, I am of the opinion, envious of your wealth, and though he knew of your relations with his wife he consented to the situation. Later on, when you and the woman agreed that you would like to make the arrangement a permanent one, you plotted together to murder Chao. See here! I have the original record of accusation handed in by the woman and accusing Ch'eng Ta-t'ung of the crime. The statement that you wrote here to-day and this accusation are both in the same handwriting! If you are not the murderer, who is?'

"Mr T'eng then ordered the finger-squeezing torture to be applied to the woman to make her speak. But Liu Shih having heard the magistrate state the details of the case as they had actually occurred, as accurately as if he had been Kuei-ku Tzu (Note 44) himself, was now thoroughly overawed and did not dare to brazen the matter out any longer.

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So, as soon as the finger-frame had been put on she confessed everything and then Pa-han was constrained to confess also.

"It appeared that he had been on increasingly intimate terms with Liu Shih for some considerable time, no one knowing about it. But Chao the tailor was afraid that people would get to know, so he tried to put a stop to their relations. Pa-han then plotted to cause his death, taking Liu Shih into his confidence, so that they could be married, but Liu Shih would not consent to the murder of her husband. But Pa-han enticed Chao into an inn as he was returning from employment and, having made him intoxicated, took him to the river's edge, where he knocked him down and battered his face in with a stone. He then threw the body into the river. He waited a few days and then, as his secret was apparently safe, he married the woman and took her to his own house. When the corpse floated up and was found and recognized, Pa-han heard that I had had a fight with Chao a few days before, so he incited the woman to accuse me of the murder. It was only after her marriage to Pa-han that she knew that it was he who had killed her husband. Then, since she was his wife, she could hardly say anything about the crime.

"After the magistrate had caused the truth to come to light, both of them were made to pay the penalty instead of me, and I was released and allowed to return home. I was welcomed and very kindly treated by my neighbours and relations, who got up a subscription for me to enable this sacrifice to be made to the gods. Now tell me, reverend sir," the man concluded, "did you ever hear such a strange story?"

"Such a clever official," returned the old man, "is indeed but very seldom met with; you are all very lucky to have such a man in this district!"

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VII

Now Ni Shan-shu had listened very attentively to the foregoing narrative but had made no sign of having heard. When the story was finished, however, he dashed off home and told his mother all about it, thus and thus, omitting no detail.

"Now that we have found such a clever official," he said, "let us at once put in our claim with the portrait as our evidence! When shall we go?"

Mother and son then made their plans, and, having ascertained which was the proper day for the hearing of petitions, they rose at daybreak and made their way to the magistrate's yamen, the mother on the arm of her son and holding the portrait. And when they arrived at the yamen they cried out at the gates until they were admitted.

When the magistrate was told that no petition was filed but that only a small scroll was handed in, he was very much astonished and interviewed them, inquiring what their grievance was. Mei Shih then told him all about the matter—what Shan-chi's behaviour had been and about the will that her husband had left. Magistrate T'eng then took the scroll and dismissed them, saying that he would have to consider the case carefully in his private room.

"Within the dead man's portrait a mystery dark is sealed,
But riches great will come to light if truth can be revealed;
A widow and her orphaned son in poverty await
The reading of the riddle by the clever magistrate!"

When the court was closed the magistrate retired to his private apartments and studied the scroll carefully. It represented, as we know, Prefect Ni's portrait showing him with a child in his arms and with his finger pointing to the ground. The magistrate looked long and attentively at it, and thought within himself: "The child is evidently Shan-

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shu; that is quite obvious. Can it be that the hand pointing downwards is an exhortation to me to remember that he is dead and that therefore I must assist him? It is somewhat difficult for me to take any action when this will is on record. But he said that there is a riddle hidden in the scroll! There must therefore be some other meaning; where will my reputation for ingenuity be if I cannot find it?"

So every day, when he was alone, he unrolled and studied the picture, but though he pondered over it again and again he could make nothing of it, and after many days he was still as much in the dark as ever. "If only I could get some clue," he said to himself, "I ought to be able to solve the puzzle!"

It happened that one afternoon, after he had taken his midday meal, his servant came in to bring him some tea as he was studying the scroll. He reached out his hand to take the cup but accidentally knocked his hand against it and spilled some of the tea, which wetted the picture. So, putting down the cup, he went out on to the verandah of the room and spread out the scroll to dry in the sun. And then suddenly to his great astonishment he saw, as the sun's rays caught the picture, some shadowy writing inside! He quickly detached the front surface of the picture from the backing, and there found a strip of paper which had been concealed between the two. It was indeed Prefect Ni's true will, and these were its terms:

"This is the will of an aged official holding the rank of Prefect, being near the threshold of death after eighty years, and at enmity with no one.

My younger son, Shan-shu, is now one year old and will long remain of tender years. My elder son, Shan-chi, is utterly lacking in filial piety and I fear lest he may in the future cause the undoing of his brother.

The two new houses and the estate that I have recently bought I bequeath to him.

The smaller and older house to the east I bequeath to Shan-shu. Though this house is not large, yet beneath the

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left-hand wall are buried five jars, each containing a thousand taels of silver. And beneath the right-hand wall are likewise buried five jars, each also containing one thousand taels of silver, and also one jar containing one thousand taels of gold. This will compensate for the difference in value of the other property.

When this matter is adjusted by some astute official let Shan-shu, my son, give him a reward, to wit three hundred taels of silver.

Ni Shou-lien, his true signature at the age of 81 years."

Date and seal.

This portrait, then, was the original one that Prefect Ni had had prepared when he was 81 years old and Shan-shu was just a year old. The old proverb says: "No one but a father knows a son"!

Magistrate T'eng was a man who never failed to make use of an opportunity, and when he saw mention of all that silver and gold, his mouth watered. He knit his brows in thought, but his plans were soon made, and his first act was to send his lictors round to summon Shan-chi to his yamen.

Now it need hardly be stated that the latter had grown very pleased indeed with his position as sole possessor of his father's estate, and he gloated over it daily. And when the magistrate's runners came to summon him so urgently, he could not refuse to go, so he set off at once, and on his arrival at the yamen he found the magistrate sitting in court and waiting for him. His arrival was announced and he was ushered in without delay.

"You are the late Prefect Ni's elder son?" the magistrate asked.

"I am, sir," was the reply.

"Your step-mother, Mei Shih, has made a complaint before me," went on the official, "to the effect that you have driven her and her son out, and that you are usurping the whole property! What have you to say to this charge?"

"My brother, Shan-shu," replied Shan-chi, "is the son

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of a concubine, and has been under my protection since the time he was a baby. Now he and his mother have gone of their own free will to live apart from my household. It is not true that I have driven them out!

"As regards the property, it was divided according to my father's will, which I would not, of course, dare to oppose."

"Where is this will?" asked the magistrate.

"I have it at home," was the reply, "and I will go and get it for your inspection."

"The complaint states," went on the magistrate, "that the estate is worth about half a million taels. This is no trifling matter, and it remains to be seen whether the will in your possession is genuine or not! I am by no means forgetful of the fact that yours is an official family, and I do not wish to cause any needless unpleasantness. To-morrow I will summon Mei Shih and her son, and afterwards I will go in person to your house and will inspect this estate. We must not allow considerations of friendly feelings to interfere with the impartial administration of justice!" (Note 45). And, so saying, the magistrate ordered his lictors to escort Shan-chi out and to go and summon Mei Shih and her son to come before him early next morning.

Now the lictors had already had their bribe from Shan-chi, so they let him go without more ado and then went to the East village to do their errand with regard to Mei Shih.

The magistrate's words had indeed sounded ominous in Shan-chi's ears! He felt very apprehensive about his position, for of course there had been no proper division of his father's estate at all. It is true that he had his father's written instructions, and this was a tower of strength to him, but he felt that his position would be greatly improved if he could induce some of his relations to come and give evidence on his behalf. So he busied himself all the rest of the day and far into the night in sending out presents of silver among his three clans (Note 46), requesting various members there-

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of to come round the next day when the magistrate's visit was paid, and if the latter asked them any questions about the will to do their best to help.

It must, however, be stated that his relations in the three clans had, since Prefect Ni's death, received from Shan-chi neither box nor tray of presents, nor at New Year had any of them been asked by him to any entertainment. So now they were not a little surprised to receive from him lumps of silver, and it seemed to all of them a case of "not burning incense when times are good and turning to embrace Buddha's feet when trouble comes." They were all glad enough to have some money to spend, but each one resolved to wait and see what the magistrate's attitude might be before committing himself either way. Indeed a contemporaneous verse states the case as follows:

"Blame not your father's widow for the action just begun,
The fault lies in your selfishness in dealing with her son,
The evidence of all your friends indeed is dearly bought!
'Twere better to have giv'n the lad the satin that he sought!"

And as for Mei Shih, when she saw that the runners had come to summon her again before the magistrate, she felt at once that he was going to give a decision in her favour, so early next morning she went to the yamen to hear what Mr T'eng might have to say to her.

"Towards you, a widow, and your orphaned son," said the magistrate when she appeared before him, "I feel most sympathetic; and I hope very much to be able to find a way out of your difficulties for you. But if, as I hear he has, Shan-chi has his father's will in support of his actions, I may find trouble in overruling them!"

"It is quite true," replied Mei Shih, "that there is a will, but it was only a makeshift, a temporary arrangement made solely to protect my son and it does not represent my

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deceased husband's true wishes! When you, sir, inspect the account books and see the figures connected with the estate you will see for yourself how the case lies!"

"The most able of officials," responded the magistrate, "meets often with immense difficulties in adjusting the details of a family estate! I can undertake that you and your son will not lack food and clothing, but I beg of you not to expect too much!"

At this Mei Shih expressed her grateful thanks and added: "We shall indeed be well satisfied if we are provided against hunger and the cold. How could we expect to be great folk like Shan-chi?" And having thus arrived at a clear understanding, the magistrate told Mei Shih to take her son and go and wait for him in Shan-chi's house.

VIII

Now Shan-chi had had the reception hall all tidied up and swept that morning early, and had placed in the middle of the floor a great chair draped with a tiger's skin. He then brought in a large bowl full of fragrant incense and finally sent out to urge his relations to come round quickly and await the arrival of the magistrate.

When Mei Shih and Shan-shu arrived there was already a large assembly of relations who were busy exchanging greetings, but several of them could not help addressing a few kind words to her. Shan-chi was bursting with rage and importance, but he had perforce to keep calm; and each of his relations was busy thinking of what he should say if the magistrate should ask any questions.

After a while they heard in the distance the noise of shouting which betokened that the magistrate was approaching, and Shan-chi smoothed down his robes and then went out to meet him, the more elderly and intelligent of his relations following him, while the younger and more timid members

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of the assembly all took cover behind the "spirit-wall" (Note 47) outside and watched from there to see what should happen.

They first saw a large number of banners and signs being carried along two by two in a long line, and behind these there was seen a large blue silk umbrella, under which rode in his chair the talented and intelligent Mr T'eng.

The procession arrived at length at the door of Shan-chi's house, and the banner-bearers all knelt down in two rows at a shout from their leader. Mei Shih and the Ni brothers likewise knelt down to receive the magistrate, and, at another word of command from the leader of the runners, the chair-bearers halted the great chair, and Magistrate T'eng came slowly and deliberately out.

He was just about to enter the door, when suddenly he halted and made a number of obeisances, apparently to the empty air, and muttered something which nobody could hear, as if in answer to some greeting. All the assembly was very much astonished at this and watched him intently to see what he would do next. They saw, to their amazement, Magistrate T'eng making polite gestures all the way into the hall, and keep on bowing to nobody, and heard him make the polite remarks that convention demands, although he did not seem to be addressing them to anyone in particular. Once in the hall he bowed towards the tigerskin-covered chair as though he were acknowledging an invitation to be seated thereon; and then suddenly he turned round and, seizing another chair, he placed it in position as though for a host. Then, at last, after another interval of polite and self-deprecatory gestures, he took his seat on the chair of honour!

All kept their eyes fixed upon him, for it seemed as though he were addressing a spirit, and no one dared go near him but all stood at the side and stared. They saw the magistrate sitting there and bowing as though listening to the words of another, and at length he said: "Your wife places her case

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entirely in my hands! How, now, is this question to be settled?"

Having said this he leaned forward and remained for a considerable time in an attitude of rapt attention, and every now and then he would shake his head and put out his tongue as if in horror and disgust at what he heard!

At last he spoke again. "Yes, indeed," he said, "your elder son's conduct has been really too disgraceful!" A pause. "But what provision do you desire should be made for your younger son? The cottage to the east? Yes, but what about maintenance for him?" Another pause. "Yes. . . . Yes. . . . To be sure, I will carry out your instructions. . . . This also is to be given to your younger son? I, your servant, will be honoured to be able to carry out your commands!"

Then followed a longer pause, during which the magistrate started as though in surprise. Then, making an obeisance, he said: "Oh! but I could never venture to accept so handsome a present!" And for some moments he kept on making gestures as though refusing something. But at last he said: "Well, of course, if you insist so strongly in the matter I shall perforce have to agree! I will not fail to give an order to your second son for the property." Then, rising at length, he again made obeisance several times and said that he must take his leave and return.

All still waited, staring, and saw the magistrate rise up and then suddenly turn round and round as if looking for some one!

"Where has Mr Ni disappeared to?" he asked.

"We have seen no Mr Ni here!" replied the head lictor.

"Well, this is indeed a most mysterious business," said the magistrate. Then, turning to Shan-chi, he said: "Just now your worthy father met me at the door, escorted me in here, and has been talking to me for the last half-hour! You all heard him, did you not?"

"Your servants did *not* hear him!" was the reply.

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"A tall gentleman," went on the magistrate, "with a thin face, high cheek-bones, handsome eyes, long eyebrows, big ears, scanty beard and white hair. He wore an official hat, a red robe with a gold belt, and black boots. That was Prefect Ni, surely?"

Everyone, at this speech, was struck cold with fright, and all knelt down and said that that was, without doubt, what he looked like in the flesh.

"But how was it that you did not all see him?" the magistrate asked. "He said that he had two big houses on his estate, and a third one, older and smaller, to the east of these houses. Is that actually the case?"

Shan-chi, not daring to deny this, said that it was so.

"Let us then go," said the magistrate, "and inspect the little house in question, for I have something else to say about it!"

And all the company, seeing that he talked so long and with such an appearance of reality, and described Prefect Ni so accurately, believed that the latter had really appeared, and one and all put out their tongues in horror!

Of course, though no one of those present suspected it, the whole of the foregoing scene was merely a piece of acting by the magistrate, who had only, after all, described the Prefect's portrait, and deceit underlay all that he had said and done!

Here is a verse to witness:

"A judge's reputation is too often built on fraud;
So be careful of the spirits when they take their walks abroad!
But if this deceit had not been used by the cunning magistrate,
Would the elder son have agreed to part with any of his estate?"

So the whole assembly left the hall, Shan-chi leading the way and the rest following. They arrived at the East cottage

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. . . . Put out his tongue in horror

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and the magistrate ascertained that it was the house in which Prefect Ni had lived before he became an official, and that after the larger houses had been built it had been used as a granary. There were, indeed, several heaps of rice and wheat still left in it, and these were guarded by a caretaker who lived there.

The magistrate walked round the premises and then sat down in the principal room and said to Shan-chi: "That really must have been your father's spirit! He told me all the details of his estate and instructed me to announce a decision for him. This old cottage he wishes his second son, Shan-shu, to have. You are, of course, agreeable to this?"

"It must be as the Tower of Grace says," replied Shan-chi, ko-towing as he spoke.

The magistrate then took the account book and went through it, remarking what a fine estate it was. Then, after reading the instructions about the division of the property, he went on with a smile: "Of course, the late Prefect *did* record his instructions in writing, but just now he told me verbally that his son, Shan-chi, had been very remiss in various directions and that he did not know quite what he should do about it." Then, calling Shan-chi to step forward, he said: "The instructions for dividing the property are on record; the land and the gardens are still all to be the property of Shan-chi and Shan-shu has no right to contest this!"

Here Mei Shih interrupted with a groan of despair, and she was just about to implore the magistrate to take pity on her when the latter continued: "But this old cottage your father wishes to be handed over to Shan-shu, together with everything that is in it; and Shan-chi must not contest this!"

Now Shan-chi thought to himself: "There is nothing here but a tumble-down house and a few pieces of broken furniture! This is no great matter." And he recollected with satisfaction that he had sold nearly all the grain which

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the cottage had contained a month or so before and that very little was left, and that thus he was in luck. So he bowed his head and said: "The Tower of Grace has thus decided. Let it be so!"

"You two," the magistrate continued, "have thus agreed upon this division. Let there be no regret or recrimination afterwards! And you all," he went on, turning to the crowd of relations, "are hereby called upon to be witnesses of this arrangement! Prefect Ni told me just now, face to face, that there were buried under this floor, near the wall, five earthen jars, each containing one thousand taels of silver! These he wishes his second son, Shan-shu, to have!"

Shan-chi, who did not for a moment believe that any silver was really buried there, said: "If indeed the silver is there, it would, of course, belong to my brother, even if it were ten thousand taels! I would never think of contesting his right in the matter!"

"If you did contest his right," replied the magistrate severely, "I would not allow you to do so!" And he ordered his runners to bring in some picks and spades; and Mei Shih and her son kept their eyes wide open, as you may well imagine.

The men were then ordered to go over to the eastern wall and to dig in the ground there. And, sure enough, five large earthen jars were soon brought to light! They were lifted out and opened, and each one was found to be full of shining silver! The contents of one of them were emptied out and weighed and were found to scale 62½ catties, or in all exactly five thousand taels.

Everyone looked on in utter amazement, and Shan-chi had perforce to believe in the genuineness of the whole affair, against his better judgment. "If my father's spirit did not really appear and interview this magistrate," he thought to himself, "how could he possibly have known about all this silver, when we ourselves had no notion of its existence?"

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And he watched the five jars all being put out in a line in front of them.

The magistrate then spoke again, this time to Mei Shih. "Underneath the other wall," he said, "there are likewise five jars of silver and also one jar of gold. When the late Prefect Ni appeared to me just now, he insisted on my taking the jar of gold as my reward for adjudicating this matter. I was, of course, unwilling to do so, but he refused to take no for an answer; and in the end I was obliged to accede to his wishes."

Mei Shih ko-towed as she replied. "The five thousand taels found on the other side," she said humbly, "already exceed my utmost expectations! If there are, in truth, a further five jars containing five thousand taels on this side also, we would, of course, not offer any opposition to the deceased's wishes in the matter!"

"How was I to know," the magistrate continued, "that there was any money hidden here except for what your husband told me? He does not indeed speak empty words!" And he told the workmen to dig again under the western wall and there likewise six large jars were unearthed, five containing silver and one containing gold.

And when Shan-chi saw all that gleaming metal, his eyes shot forth fire, for he was beside himself with anger at not being able to lay a finger upon any of it, no, not so much as the value of one iron nail, because of the words which he had just spoken. So he did not utter a syllable.

And the magistrate wrote out a certificate of ownership and handed it to Shan-shu, and likewise made over to him the slave who was acting as caretaker. The joy of Mei Shih and her son then knew no bounds and again and again they ko-towed to, and thanked, Mr T'eng. And Shan-chi, though brimming over with rage, forced himself to ko-tow once or twice also, and to say: "Our thanks are due to you, O Tower of Grace, for deciding this matter for us!"

The magistrate then wrote out some paper seals and stuck

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them on the jar of gold which had thus fallen into his clutches (Note 48), and had it carried out and put in his chair, to be transported to his yamen with him. And all said that they were satisfied that Prefect Ni had indeed given it to him as a thank-offering and that it was only just that he should get it. No one dared to utter a word of dissent. And thus it was indeed a case of "When the clam and the curlew are locked together in strife, then is the fisherman's opportunity." (Note 49).

Now if only Shan-chi had behaved uprightly and had consented to treat his brother generously, dividing the property evenly, this thousand taels of gold would have meant five hundred taels to each of them and would not have found a resting-place in the magistrate's hands! But, as things happened, the money went over to a stranger and a great deal of unnecessary indignation was caused to Shan-chi, whose reputation for unfilial and unfraternal conduct was, in addition, established. And endless plans to deprive another of his birthright only recoiled upon his own household.

But it is needless further to speak of these matters. I will only tell how on the following day Mei Shih and her son went again to the magistrate's yamen to thank him. The latter had already removed the will from the old Prefect's picture and had stuck the scroll together again so as to leave no trace. He then handed it back to Mei Shih, who at last understood that the reason why the hand of the figure was pointing downwards was to indicate the existence of the buried treasure.

Now, having obtained possession of the ten jars of silver, they expended one-half in purchasing land and orchards and soon became rich and prosperous. Shan-shu subsequently married and had three sons, who studied diligently and made a reputation for themselves as scholars.

And thus one branch of the Ni family prospered exceedingly. But the two sons of Shan-chi proved themselves

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to be wanderers and ne'er-do-weels who squandered their fortune; and after Shan-chi's death they sold their two big houses to their uncle. And of all the people round who knew the history of the family there was not one who did not say that it was a just reward from on high!

"The acts of Heaven are always straight and by no means underhand,
And we may smile at Ni Shan-chi and the foolish tricks he planned.
Now all agree that the elder son deceived his father's wife,
And caused his long-dead sire to cast a shadow over his life.
The writing hid in the picture scroll was fraught with words of fate,
And the hidden gold beneath the wall was snatched by the magistrate!
Oh, let this tale be a warning to all to be good and just and true,
Instead of disputing and going to law—a thing no man should do!"

NOTES

Note 39.—"Ch'ung Yang" is the name of one of the most important of the Chinese festivals, which, besides being observed as general holidays, correspond to our quarter days and entail a general settling up of accounts.

On this festival, a certain worthy of the Han Dynasty (first century B.C.) was saved from a violent death by escaping up a mountain by night. Hence the day is also called "Kao Teng" ("The high ascent"). The Chinese usually ascend any hill that may be in the vicinity, and fly kites, on this day, as an auspicious omen for longevity.

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Note 40.—The "Year Dish": When a boy is a year old, a large tray covered with objects of ordinary use, such as a pen, a coin, an official button, a knife, etc., is placed near him. The object that he grasps first indicates in what direction his destiny will lie. This ceremony is usually performed in the presence of all available relations and friends of the family.

Note 41.—Pulses: A Chinese doctor is not content with feeling the pulse in the wrist of one hand of his patient, but gets his impression of the latter's condition from other arteries all over the body.

Note 42.—Testamentary disposition: In China a man's property must descend, upon his death, equally to all his sons; daughters are ignored. A written will is therefore only to help in the fair distribution of the property. A son who imagines that he has not received his rightful share is at liberty to dispute the arrangement made, but a friendly agreement with the help of neighbours and relations is usually sufficient and is regarded as binding. It is very seldom that an official is called in to adjudicate in such cases! *Vide* the verse at the conclusion of this story.

Note 43.—After a corpse is placed in the coffin, priests come in to read prayers every seven days. In the case of an old man this should be done seven times, and the funeral cannot therefore take place within 49 days of death. To fix the date for the funeral before this period has elapsed would be deemed indecent haste.

Note 44.—Kuei-ku Tzu: "The Sage of the Devil's Gully"—a philosopher of the fourth century B.C., famous for his skill in divination and clairvoyance.

Note 45.—A conventional phrase, commonly used when one official has dealings with another or with another's family, to excuse his discourtesy if he should have to act contrary to the interests of those concerned.

Note 46.—His three clans: his father's, his mother's and his wife's.

Note 47.—Spirit Wall: A short isolated wall built opposite the main entrance of any important building in China. Evil influences can only travel in straight lines, so that they are thus prevented by this barrier from entering the premises.
The spirit wall built in front of any official yamen has painted on it, as a warning against official covetousness, a fabulous monster which devours wicked people.

Note 48.—A thousand taels of gold would have been worth about ten thousand taels of silver.

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Note 49.—An allusion to the well-known story of the famous statesman, Su Tai, of the fourth century B.C. He was advising the king of Chao to stop his warfare with the state of Yen, for he feared lest the Ch'in state would take advantage of their rivalry to conquer them both. So he told the parable of a curlew which inserted his beak into an open clam-shell. The clam promptly closed its shell, holding the bird fast. While they were locked together in this manner, a fisherman came up and carried them both off.

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The Angler loves to pass his days with wine to suit his needs,
He pipes his tuneful roundelays deep hidden in the reeds;
The placid lake no ripple shows and not a cloud doth pass,
Water and sky are of one hue, a deep unfathomable blue,
Like lustrous glass.

THIS verse was written by one Yang Pei of the Sung Dynasty when on a visit to the Great Lake. This lake is some thirty *li* south-west of the capital city of the province of Kiangsu. And how vast it is! Two hundred *li* from east to west, one hundred and twenty *li* from north to south, five hundred *li* is the measure of its circumference, and its area is more than thirty-six thousand *ch'ing*. In it are seventy-two islands, and of these the two greatest are the islands of East and West Tung T'ing, which rise up sudden and precipitous from the water; men call them the Two Hills and the people of these islands are clever traders and go into every district buying and selling; they have been made the subject of a proverb which says that they can even pierce the heavens with their astuteness.

It is of these people that the following story is told:

I

Upon the West island of Tung T'ing there once lived a certain man of property named Kao Tsan. As a young man his calling was that of a rice merchant in the two provinces of Hunan and Hupei, and after he had thus amassed a considerable fortune, he retired and opened two large pawnshops in Soochow, in each of which he placed a manager in charge, while he himself remained at home and lived in

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luxury and ease. His wife was a lady of the Chin family and bore him two children, a son whose name was Kao P'iao and a daughter called Kao Ch'iu-fang, who was two years older than her brother.

To instruct his two children, Mr Kao engaged a reverend and experienced teacher, who came to give them lessons in their home. And the girl, Ch'iu-fang, proved herself to be of extraordinarily brilliant intelligence. After she had studied for seven years and was but twelve years old, she had become thoroughly conversant with all the classics and her handwriting was of the most perfect description. So at the age of thirteen she ceased her reading and took up the study of needlework and embroidery in the women's apartments, and in this art also she soon acquired the most exquisite skill.

At the age of sixteen it was apparent that she was an exceedingly elegant young lady of exceptional beauty; there is, in fact, a poem about her to the following effect:

" Chaste is her form as a snow-flake lightly falling,
Peerless is her beauty as a peach-bloom drenched in dew,
Eyes like autumn rills are set under brows as black as jet,
Taper are her fingers as the shoots of spring bamboo.
Tiny feet no bigger than the petals of a lotus,
Her grace when she walks sets a-quivering the air,
Ladies of the ancient days, famous for their winning ways,
With such a dainty maid as she cannot indeed compare ! "

And her father, Kao Tsan, was unwilling that so beautiful and accomplished a damsel should be betrothed to any ordinary young man (Note 50), so he gave out that he would only accept as a son-in-law a superior person of unusual literary attainments and personal attractions, no matter how magnificent his betrothal presents might be; and he added that when the match should be made he himself would make good any possible deficiency in this respect by supplying what was necessary to his daughter's wedding portion and equipment.

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Many suitors of affluent families sent to try and obtain the damsel's hand in marriage and Mr Kao made minute inquiries of the middlemen as to the literary qualifications and personal appearance of the intending bridegrooms, and finding them all deficient he dismissed the inquirers. And though the islands of Tung T'ing are isolated from the rest of the world, the lake shores border upon three prefectures; and since Mr Kao was a man of considerable affluence, the middlemen soon spread the news in all parts that the daughter of the Kao family was not only pre-eminent in beauty and talents but that her father was prepared in addition to make her a generous allowance on her marriage to a handsome and accomplished young man.

And so it came about that no matter how slender might be his attainments and attractions, every young fellow in those parts made inquiries and tried to obtain the damsel's hand through middlemen. The latter all gave their principals credit for the most superlative talents and attractions, but when minute inquiries came to be made by Mr Kao they were all found to be very ordinary young men with a steady level of inferiority in the matter of the required qualifications. And Mr Kao became so wearied with such deceit that he was unable to bear it any longer.

"From henceforth you must not talk at random in this way," he declared to the middlemen. "If indeed you have anyone of outstanding parts, you will have in future to bring him with you when you come to interview me. Then I can see at a glance whether he will suit me or not, and much trouble will be saved!"

And after he had expresed himself thus, the middlemen ceased to come to his gates with so little justification as before. It was indeed a case of

"You can never rely upon what you are told,
It is better to trust your own sight,
So the test of an acid apply to your gold
And thus bring all imposture to light."

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II

And now our story takes us elsewhere, for I must tell you that in the village of P'ing Hsün near Wu Chiang in the Soochow prefecture there lived at this time a *Hsiu Ts'ai* named Ch'ien Sh'ing, whose *hao* was Wan-hsüan. This young man had studied till he was replete with learning; he was especially well informed about all historical happenings from the earliest times and was endowed, in addition, with a most unusual natural ability.

"Pearly were his teeth; his lips of fine vermilion;
Clearly pencilled eyebrows; eyes as bright as any star;
A deportment of the best, no matter how ill-dressed,
To find a better man than he you'd have to travel far.
He could write a thousand characters in less than half-a-minute,
Their elegance of form would be sure to strike the eye;
Of a thousand far and near, 'twould be hard to find his peer,
As nobody who saw him once would venture to deny."

For many generations Mr Ch'ien's family had consisted of scholars and students, but they had never been affluent. Unfortunately both his parents had died when he was yet young, and after that he became poorer than ever, so that at the time of our story he had not yet been able to acquire a wife, although he had come to man's estate. He had only one old retainer, Ch'ien Hsing by name, who lived with him to their mutual advantage, for the old man used to go out day after day as a peddler, and the profit that he made he used to hand over to his master and thus both were provided for—scantily enough, for sometimes they hardly had sufficient to eat. But in the year in question Mr Ch'ien had succeeded in getting his degree as *Hsiu-ts'ai*.

And in the same district, outside the north gate of Wu

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Chiang there lived a cousin of his who was very well-to-do, and he invited Mr Ch'ien to come and live with him and continue his studies under his roof. This man was named Yen Chün, his *hao* being Po Ya. He was born in the same year as Ch'ien Ch'ing and at the time now under consideration they were each eighteen years old, but Yen Chün was the other's senior by three months and used to call him "younger brother." Mr Yen's father had died, his mother only remaining; and he also was unmarried.

Now you will think it strange that I have said that Ch'ien Ch'ing was unmarried because he was so poor and that Yen Chün was rich and had reached the age of eighteen and was also without a wife. But there was a reason for this. This Yen Chün was a most ambitious young man and had sworn an oath that he would remain unmarried unless he was able to choose as his bride a lady of exceptional beauty, so that hitherto he had not been able to find what he sought. And the situation was complicated by the fact that he himself was of the most conspicuous ugliness. How ugly he was the following verse will testify:

"A complexion as dingy as the bottom of a cauldron,
A bulging eye that goggled like a big brass bell,
Pock-marked was his ugly face, not a sign of youthful grace,
Brown was his fuzzy hair and straggling as well (Note 51).
Yellow were his teeth as though coated o'er with saffron,
Scrap-iron welded would have made a better frame,
Fingers long and lumpy; figure short and stumpy;
And Yen Chün was his name."

And although he was so very ill-favoured, he was exceedingly fond of clothes, and used to dress himself up in the most brilliant reds and greens. Furthermore he used always to assume a dainty and affected little voice and an artificial titter when he spoke, for he imagined that he

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was really a most elegant person. And in spite of the fact that he had no scholarship and could indeed hardly write at all, he was nevertheless given to introducing into his conversation literary tags and odds and ends of anecdotes about historical personages by way of making people think that he was a scholar.

Ch'ien Ch'ing, though he realized that he had nothing in common with his cousin, went and took up his residence in his house as a help to his own reading, and forced himself to make the best of his kinsman; and the latter was really very glad of his company and consulted him about everything, and in a word they got on very well together.

Now one day during the early part of the tenth moon, Mr Yen received a visit from a distant relation of his named Yu Ch'en, a man who was a clever trader and had borrowed capital from Mr Yen to start a fruit business with. On the day in question, Yu Ch'en had been to the Tung T'ing islands to buy a few loads of oranges for his business, and when he called he brought a present of the first oranges of the season for his kinsman. While he was on the islands he heard the story of Mr Kao's search for a son-in-law, and he passed this on to Mr Yen in the course of conversation, not thinking that it would have any special significance. But when the latter heard it, he was suddenly struck by an idea.

"I have always wanted to make a really good match," he said to himself, "and I have never been able to find any suitable bride. I should not have thought of finding one there, but with my elegant appearance and fine scholarship, and indeed with my affluence also, I ought to have no difficuty in arranging matters if the go-between is sufficiently flattering in his description of me to her father."

That night he thought the matter over and got no sleep for anxiety, and when day broke he rose and hurried over to see Yu Ch'en. When he arrived he found the latter just opening his shutters.

"Good morning, honoured sir," said Yu Ch'en when he

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saw Mr Yen coming. "What brings you round so early this morning?"

"Well," replied Mr Yen, "there is an important matter on which I wish to consult you, and I was afraid that you might be going out to-day and therefore I have called thus early."

"I cannot guess, honoured sir," replied Yu Ch'en, "on what business you are likely to depute me; but come inside and sit down and I can then receive your instructions." And when they had entered and greeted one another ceremoniously they took their seats in the manner of host and guest.

"Whatever it may be, sir," said Yu Ch'en, "I must of course do my best to serve you, but I fear that you are rash in relying on the help of one so insignificant as myself!"

"It is nothing less," replied Mr Yen, "than to enlist your services as a marriage go-between!"

"In that you will enable me to benefit to the extent of the go-between's fee," remarked Yu Ch'en. "I am extremely obliged to you, sir, for your kindness. But who, may I ask, is the party concerned?"

"None other than the Kao family on the Tung T'ing island," replied Mr Yen, "of whom you spoke yesterday. This match is one on which I have set my heart, and I beg that you will be kind enough to act on my behalf."

This caused Yu Ch'en to smile. "Please forgive me, sir," he said, "if I speak quite frankly. If it were any other family, I should obey you with alacrity. But seeing that it is the Kao family I fear that I must ask you to find some other go-between!"

"But why do you refuse?" asked Mr Yen. "It was you yourself who mentioned the matter to me, so why is it that you should suggest that I should find someone else to act for me?"

"I do not exactly refuse," replied Yu Ch'en, "but that Mr Kao is such a curious man that it is really not easy for

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me to speak to him in this matter. And it is for that reason that I am somewhat nervous about it."

"On most subjects," said Mr Yen, "it may be that Mr Kao is apt to talk somewhat at random and to introduce irrelevant matter into his conversation. It may, for instance, not be easy to talk business with him. But to approach him as a marriage go-between is an act of momentous consequence, involving the uniting of two individuals for life. Of course if the fact is that his daughter is not willing to get married at all, there is an end of the matter. But if she is, there must be a go-between to represent each side. Mr Kao may be a peculiar man, but he knows well enough that an offer of marriage made by a responsible go-between is not to be treated lightly. What then are you afraid of? It seems to me as if you were inventing difficulties on purpose for some reason best known to yourself! If you refuse to undertake this most serious and important business for me, it will be easy for me to find someone else, but when the matter is all arranged please do not expect to be asked to the wedding feast, that's all!"

And so saying he rose in a huff to go. But Yu Ch'en, who had borrowed money from him and on ordinary occasions was only too anxious to be polite, seeing that he was annoyed changed his tone quickly.

"Please, honoured sir, do not be offended," he said; "but be good enough to sit down once more and we will talk the matter over again."

"If you are willing to go, say so," said Mr Yen, "and if you are not willing to go there is an end of the matter. What is there further to discuss?" But though he spoke thus, he turned about and sat down once more.

"It is not that I am purposely making difficulties," explained Yu Ch'en, "but that old Kao is really a most peculiar man. In other cases, it is the bride who is the object of criticism but in this case it is the bridegroom! Only if he approves of the latter's personal appearance will he agree

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to accept him as a son-in-law. That is the difficulty! I fear that I shall have all my trouble for nothing and I hesitate to accept the responsibility of so difficult a task!"

"But according to your own account," objected Mr Yen, "there is not the slightest difficulty! If he wants to look at me, I am perfectly willing that he should do so and to his heart's content! I am not maimed nor disfigured in any way; why should I be afraid of him?"

And at this, Yu Ch'en could not help laughing loudly. "It is with no intention to offend you, sir," he said when he had recovered himself, "that I would remind you that though you could not, of course, be described as positively ugly, yet there are many gentlemen who are several times as good-looking as yourself, and it is quite possible that you will not fulfill Mr Kao's requirements in that respect. If you, sir, had not to have a personal interview with him beforehand, there might be some slight chance of success, but when he sees you I fear that there would be no hope at all of his agreeing!"

"Well," replied Mr Yen, "the proverb says that matches are never made without lying! You must make the most of me and say that I have preternatural talents and ability, or that this match is clearly pre-ordained by the decrees of heaven, and then it will probably be all right. It is quite possible that he will not want to see me after all."

"But what if he does want to see you?" asked Yu Ch'en. "What is to be done then?"

"Well, if he does," was the reply, "we must consult again as to the best course to pursue. But in any case I beg that you will go and do your best for me." And as he rose to go he added: "Mind now, you *must* put this matter through for me! And if you succeed in doing so there will be twenty taels for yourself, and I will return to you the acknowledgment of your debt to me that I hold, as well as paying to you the customary fee of the go-between!"

"Very well, sir," replied Yu Ch'en, "I will go." And

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when Mr Yen had reached home again he told his steward to send half-a-tael to Yu Ch'en as the amount of his boat-hire to Tung T'ing and back.

That night Mr Yen lay upon his bed and got not a wink of sleep. "I do hope," he said to himself, "that he will be careful when he goes, and that he will not return with some foolish and evasive answer. It would be most annoying if it should turn out that I had sent him in vain. Perhaps it would be well to send one of my own servants with him to hear what he says. Yes, that would be a good plan!" So, as soon as it was light next day he called a small slave boy, Hsiao I by name, and told him to accompany Yu Ch'en to the island on his errand as a marriage go-between.

But even after Hsiao I had left, Mr Yen still felt very anxious, so after a hurried toilet he went round to a neighbouring temple to consult the oracle to see whether his project would be successful or not. And there, after burning incense and ko-towing before the altar, he took the tube of divination sticks (Note 52) and shook it up and down until one of the sticks jumped out and fell to the ground. He picked it up and found that it was number 73, and the corresponding pronouncement stuck up on the wall above was the following verse:

"By ancient rite, a silver pledge to prove the pact is due,
But be prepared for news that may disturbing prove to you,
To celebrate your wedding fine your hopes are high to-day,
But that they realized will be 'tis difficult to say!"

And although Mr Yen's learning was not profound he understood the purport of this pronouncement well enough, and, becoming very annoyed at the reply that his inquiry had elicited, he strode out of the temple with a gesture of annoyance, saying to himself that such things were never to be depended upon in any case.

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He reached his house again and sat down to think. "I do not see how there can be any hitch," he said to himself. "It really cannot be that he will object to me because I am too ugly for him! Men cannot be treated in this matter as if they were women. It is not as though I could not show myself before people, and Mr Kao cannot expect to have a second Ch'en P'ing or a P'an An-jen (Note 53) as a son-in-law!"

And thinking thus he rose and fetched a silver mirror in which he studied his reflection with care, his head first on one side and then on the other. But this proceeding gave him very little consolation, and in fact he could not bear the sight of himself. So he slammed the mirror down on the table (Note 54) and sighing heavily he returned to his seat, where he remained staring vacantly and pondering for a great while.

III

Meanwhile Yu Ch'en and Hsiao I had hired a fast boat with three rowers, and meeting, as it happened, neither contrary winds nor large waves, they sped upon their journey to the sound of the squeaking of the oars and the song of the rowers, and soon arrived at the island. They reached Mr Kao's house at the hour of the sheep (Note 55), and Hsiao I carried up a visiting-card. Mr Kao invited them in and inquired their business, and when he learned that Yu Ch'en had come to make proposals for his daughter's hand, he asked on whose account the inquiries were.

"The gentleman is a relative of my own who lives near me," replied Yu Ch'en. "He is a person of considerable property, in fact about on a par with your own establishment, sir. He is eighteen years of age and is a scholar of great attainments!"

"And what sort of a young gentleman is he to look at?" asked Mr Kao, "for I have something to say on that score,

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and I must see him face to face before I give my consent."

Now Yu Ch'en knew that Hsiao I was standing just behind his chair and made no attempt to be accurate in his reply to this question, but lied with great freedom. "If you are concerned with his personal appearance," he said, "there is absolutely no room for discussion. From top to toe he is a splendid-looking fellow! Moreover, his scholarship and learning entirely fill his interior; at the age of fourteen years he competed in the first preliminary examination for the degree of *Hsiu-ts'ai* (Note 56), and his name headed the list. Since then he has not continued his scholastic career, since he is in mourning for his father, so that he has not yet obtained his degree. But several learned men have inspected his essays and have pronounced the opinion that they are those of one who is likely to come out at the head of the list even in the Chü-jen examination.

"The fact is that I have had very little experience in marriage-broking, since for some years past I have been buying fruit among your hills here. But hearing by chance that your daughter's beauty and talents were of such a high order and that you were looking out for a son-in-law, I thought that my relative would be just the kind of young man you were looking for. And thus it is that I have been bold enough to call on you."

On hearing this speech, Mr Kao was very pleased. "If your relative is really good-looking and accomplished," he said, "I would not venture to disregard your wishes in this matter. But I shall by no means be satisfied until I see him face to face. I would therefore request that you will be kind enough to bring him here to see me, and then there will be no further difficulty."

"I have told you the exact truth, sir," answered Yu Ch'en, "as you will realize in time. But the difficulty is that my relative is a young gentleman who very seldom leaves his study and I can by no means be sure that he will be willing

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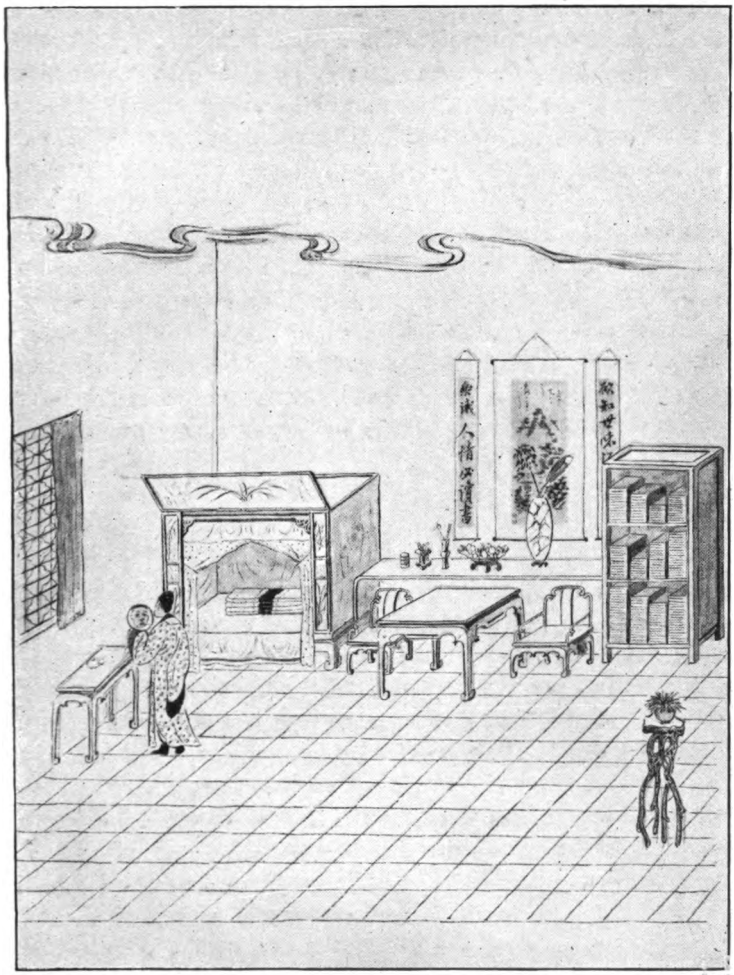

Could not bear the sight of himself

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to come and see you. I will, of course, do my best to induce him to do so, and if the wedding actually takes place, all will be well. But if by any possibility no agreement be reached my relative will necessarily feel very much abashed when he returns. And furthermore he will hold me to blame!"

"But you say," urged Mr Kao, "that he is the personification of perfection! If that is so, there is no chance of the affair not being settled! It is merely that I am an extremely cautious person in all that I do and that is my reason for wanting to see him. If your honourable relative will not condescend to come here, let me but go to your house, and you can quite casually bring the young gentleman in for me to see there. What harm would there be in that?"

And on this Yu Ch'en was in dread lest Mr Kao should go in person to Wu Chiang and there hear rumours of Mr Yen's ugliness, so he quickly changed his front.

"Oh! but I would not trouble you, sir, to come so far on any account," he exclaimed. "But, if it can be managed, I will most certainly come with my young relative to call upon you." And so saying he attempted to take his leave, but Mr Kao was most unwilling to let him depart and gave orders for food and wine to be prepared, and prevailed upon Yu Ch'en to stay and dine. They sat together for some two hours and Mr Kao pressed him to stay the night, but this Yu Ch'en refused.

"I have indeed bedding upon my boat, sir," he said, "and I must needs be at home early to-morrow morning, so we must part now, to meet again when I shall bring my young kinsman to wait upon you and shall trouble you once more."

And then he took his leave, Mr Kao insisting on paying one tael for his boat-hire. The next morning, after sailing all night with full sails before a favourable wind, they arrived back at Wu Chiang and found Mr Yen sitting idly in front

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of his doors and waiting for tidings, and as soon as they came up he quickly turned and invited them inside.

"Here you are, back at last!" he exclaimed. "And how have you fared?" And Yu Ch'en related in detail all that had taken place.

"He absolutely insists on seeing you, sir," he said, "and what we are to do about it I am sure I do not know!"

And Mr Yen found no reply ready, so Yu Ch'en, saying that they would meet later, took his leave and went home. Mr Yen retired to his own room, where he called Hsiao I and questioned him very carefully as to what had taken place, for he still felt somewhat distrustful of Yu Ch'en. But all that Hsiao I told him agreed exactly with the account that he had already received.

After a few minutes thought he was suddenly struck by an idea and he went across to Yu Ch'en's house to discuss his plan, the nature of which you shall shortly hear.

"His heart is set upon this match, his ardour burns like fire,
No stone unturned; he cannot sleep so great is his desire.
But human marriages are fixed alone at heaven's word,
To suit a mortal's whim can ne'er be tied the red silk cord!"

"Regarding that matter which we were discussing to-day," he said to Yu Ch'en, "I have thought of something which will save you from all anxiety."

"And what is that?" asked the other.

"Well, that cousin of mine, Ch'ien Wan-hsüan," replied Mr Yen, "is just now living with me for the purpose of study, and his talents and personal appearance are undoubtedly superior to mine. I suggest that you take him with you to-morrow and say that he is I. Then, having deceived Mr Kao for the time being, I shall fear no withdrawal once the betrothal presents have been sent out."

"If he sees Mr Ch'ien, there will not be the slightest chance of his refusing," replied Yu Ch'ien. "But I am afraid that Mr Ch'ien will be unwilling to play such a part!"

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"Well," replied the other, "he is my relative, and is on the best of terms with me. I have only to tell him to assume my name for a while. I do not see why he need be affronted and I think that he probably will agree." And, thus saying, Mr Yen departed and returned home.

That evening he went into the study to take his dinner with Mr Ch'ien, and took care to provide both food and wine of unusually fine description for the occasion, which made Mr Ch'ien wonder what was in the wind.

"I am a daily burden to you," he declared, "and this evening you have spread the board thus magnificently. I should like, if I may, to inquire the reason for this."

"First take a little more wine," answered Mr Yen. "I have, as a matter of fact, a small favour to ask of you. But you must promise in advance not to refuse me!"

"If there is any matter in which I can oblige you," replied his cousin, "I shall of course not venture to disobey your instructions, but I am at a loss to know how I can do you a service."

"I will tell you the exact truth," said Mr Yen. "That man Yu Ch'en who owns the fruit business opposite is now acting as a marriage go-between on my behalf, and the young lady concerned is a daughter of the Kao family that lives on the West Tung T'ing island. He has already been very flattering in the description that he has given of me to Mr Kao, and has said that my literary attainments and personal appearance are something quite extraordinary. In fact I fear that he has allowed himself somewhat to overstep the limit in this respect. And old Mr Kao says that he wants to see me first and has asked me to go over there and visit him before I send him the betrothal presents. They were talking over it yesterday.

"Now it seems to me that if I go myself I may not come up to the description that has been given of me, and then not only will Yu Ch'en lose face, but difficulties will be raised about the match itself. So on this account I want you

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to personate me and go with Yu Ch'en to see the man. And, having deceived him in this way, you will be of the greatest assistance in bringing off the marriage. My gratitude to you will be endless and will, of course, be expressed in a substantial way."

This proposition made Mr Ch'ien think a little. "In any other matter," he said at last, "I would obey you with alacrity. But I fear that what you propose would really not quite do. You might well succeed in deceiving the man for the time being, but when he found out afterwards, both you and I would be in a very unpleasant position!"

"But I only want to deceive him temporarily!" cried Mr Yen. "Once we get past the stage of the betrothal presents, I do not care whether he knows or not. And he will not know who you are in any case. If he is annoyed, he will be annoyed with the go-between, and that will not matter to you at all. Besides he lives in Tung T'ing, a hundred *li* away, and it will take him some time to find out the truth. So pluck up your courage and go. You really cannot refuse!"

Mr Ch'ien sat in silence for a while. "If I do what he asks," he said to himself, "it will be a most ungentlemanly action, and if I do not I shall offend him deeply and I shall hardly be able to go on living with him. It is really a most awkward dilemma!"

Mr Yen, seeing that he hesitated, urged him again. "The proverb says," he remarked, "that even if the sky were to fall, there would probably always be some substantial object that would prop it up! And in this matter it is I myself who will bear the onus; so, my worthy brother, you may banish your fears!"

"I am glad to hear you say so," Mr Ch'ien replied. "But there is another matter to be considered, and that is that all my clothes are literally in tatters! Going thus to represent you, I should hardly fill the part."

"As to that," answered the other, "I have already made

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ample provision." And no further discussion took place that night, but next morning Mr Yen rose early and going over to the study he caused his servants to carry across a leather box full of clothes. In it was silk and satin raiment, all in the latest fashion and of the most beautiful colours. And in the box, moreover, had been kept cakes of dragon's saliva (ambergris), which had perfumed the contents so that their fragrance was at once apparent. These garments he handed over to his cousin to wear when he went forth upon his errand. Clean socks and silken shoes were also there and only the hat was not appropriate, but Mr Yen had provided a new one. And all these things, together with two taels of silver, he handed over to Mr Ch'ien. "This sum," he said, "is merely an advance which will help to provide materials for your further study. When this matter is brought to a successful conclusion I shall be happy to reward you handsomely. These clothes are a present to you for your own use. But I would beg of you not to talk about this matter to any one at all, for I should not like the story to get about. I have already arranged with Yu Ch'en for him to start with you early to-morrow morning."

"I will obey your instructions implicitly," replied Mr Ch'ien. "These clothes I will, of course, wear on this occasion, but I must give them back to you when I return. And this money I really cannot accept!"

"Among the ancients," remarked Mr Yen, "Chariots, horses and clothes were all shared in common between friends. Even if this affair had not come about, I would have been only too pleased and ready to have presented these poor garments to you. Please do not look upon it as an obligation. And as regards all these things, they are by no means sufficient to express my feelings of deep regard for you. If you refuse to accept them you will cause me the keenest mortification!"

"For your lavish kindness, sir," replied the other, "I am indeed extremely grateful and will accordingly, at your

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expressed desire, retain the clothes. But with regard to the money, that I cannot accept!"

"If you are really determined to refuse," remarked Mr Yen, "I can only infer that you are unwilling to undertake this commission." And then, at last, did Mr Ch'ien consent.

On the same day Mr Yen made arrangements with Yu Ch'ien, who at first attempted to dissociate himself from the project, but as he would do anything rather than offend his patron, he also was in the end forced to give way.

A boat had been duly made ready, and provisions and bedding placed on board, and a couple of young slave girls were deputed to look after the two as well as the lad Hsiao I, who had gone on the former occasion. And the three servants were all dressed up very smartly. These preparations took nearly all night and Hsiao I and the two female servants were specially instructed to call the young gentleman "master," merely, and never by any chance to address him by his name.

The next morning they all rose early and Mr Yen went over to help Mr Ch'ien with his toilet; and indeed he looked very fine in his beautiful clothes and when he moved waves of perfume emanated from him, and the swish of his robes was a pleasure to hear. He was indeed mightily improved!

Yu Ch'en was asked to come over to break his fast together with Mr Ch'ien while Hsiao I and the two slave girls went on board the boat in advance. And when at last they all set forth they sped along before a favourable breeze under a single sail and in due course arrived at the western island of Tung T'ing. The day was then far spent, so they remained on board for the night.

Next morning after breakfast when they imagined that Mr Kao would have arisen, Mr Ch'ien prepared his formal visiting-card, writing Yen Chün's name instead of his own, and adding "Your humble servant" above the inscription as a special act of politeness. Hsiao I then took the card and made his way to Mr Kao's house, where he sent in a message

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to the effect that the young master from the Yen household had been brought by Mr Yu to pay his respects. The servants all knew Hsiao I from his former visit and hastened to deliver the message, whereat Mr Kao lost no time in asking the visitors to enter, when they all stepped in, Mr Ch'ien in front and Yu Ch'ien behind, and were ushered into the reception-room.

And when Mr Kao saw that the young man was so elegant and handsome and so beautifully dressed, he was delighted to such a pitch that he was almost inclined to take his scholarship for granted!

They greeted each other ceremoniously and Mr Kao requested Mr Ch'ien to take the seat of honour. The latter protested his unwillingness to do so on the score of his youthfulness, and eventually they sat down facing east and west respectively (*Vide* Note 35).

Mr Kao then scanned the appearance of his would-be son-in-law again with the utmost satisfaction, but it was Yu Ch'en who first broke the silence, expressing his thanks for Mr Kao's kind hospitality on the occasion of his former visit, a remark which the host acknowledged with self-deprecatory courtesy.

"And this gentleman," he said, "is, I understand, your relative, young Mr Yen! I omitted the other day to inquire what is his honourable *hao!*" Whereat Mr Ch'ien said very politely that as he was yet so young he hardly felt entitled to have a *hao* at all (*Vide* Note 1). But Yu Ch'en spoke up for him and said that his *hao* was Po-ya ("Elegance and Refinement").

"Your personal name, sir," remarked Mr Kao on this, "has been most appropriately chosen!" at which Mr Ch'ien was overcome by modest confusion.

Mr Kao then made polite inquiries as to the former status and occupation of his father and grandfathers, to which Mr Ch'ien made careful and minute replies, and all sounded extremely satisfactory.

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"Well, he is all right as regards external qualities, at any-rate," thought Mr Kao. "But what about his scholarship, I wonder? I will just call in my son and his tutor and we will have a few questions asked to see if he has been properly educated!"

The tea was then changed as courtesy demanded (Note 57) and Mr Kao sent a message over to the study to request the presence of the tutor and the young master, to be introduced to the guests. And soon they appeared. The tutor was a scholarly-looking person of about fifty, and he brought with him a lad whose hair had not yet been braided into a queue. The introduction then took place and greetings were interchanged. And Mr Ch'ien noticed that the boy was very good-looking and thought to himself that if his sister were equally pretty her husband would be a lucky man.

Fresh tea was then brought in and Mr Kao addressed the tutor.

"The home of this gentleman," he said, "is in Wu Chiang. Though his years are few his scholarship is great!" And the tutor, taking his employer's hint, turned to Mr Ch'ien.

"Wu Chiang is a place famous for scholarship," he said, "and also for men who are experienced in affairs beyond the average elsewhere. There have been three famous men that have come from your honourable locality. May I ask if you can give me their names?"

"Fan Li, Chang Han, and Lu Kuei-meng," answered Mr Ch'ien promptly, and the tutor then asked him why these men were held to be worthy of high estimation. And the two then embarked upon a learned discussion as to the respective merits of these worthies, asking and answering questions. Mr Ch'ien soon perceived that the tutor's learning was of a very ordinary character, so he talked away unembarrassed, introducing indiscriminate classical quotations and allusions to events in ancient and modern history until the tutor was overawed and had no further questions to ask, but contented himself with murmuring from time to

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time, "What talent! Oh, what talent!" while old Mr Kao was so delighted that he kept stamping his feet and waving his arms in an ecstasy of admiration.

He gave orders that a meal of the best food and wine should immediately be prepared, and the attendants had the table brought out and spread with every kind of delicacy. Mr Kao himself set out the chopsticks and wine cup for his young friend, who returned the compliment as courtesy demanded.

Then, after a preliminary passage of politeness regarding the appropriateness of Mr Ch'ien taking the seat of honour, they took their seats as before, Mr Kao and Mr Ch'ien facing east and west, and almost as soon as the order was given dainty viands of all kinds covered the table in the twinkling of an eye.

It may seem surprising that it was all done so promptly, but it should be explained that Madam Kao, who loved her daughter very dearly, when she heard that the go-between had returned bringing young Mr Yen, had entered the reception-room and hidden herself behind a screen, whence she peeped out at him from time to time during the interview. And on realizing that the young aspirant was such an elegant and accomplished youth and had such a clear ringing voice, she made up her mind about him at once; so she had the meal all ready by the time it was ordered, and it was then put on as quickly as water could flow.

All five sat down to table, and wine followed meat and meat followed wine, and when they had all eaten their fill the hills were already outlined against the reddening sun. Mr Ch'ien and Yu Ch'en then said that they must be leaving, but Mr Kao was unwilling to let them depart and asked them to stay and spend a few days with him. But this Mr Ch'ien would not hear of and at last their host let them go. Mr Ch'ien first took his leave of the tutor and then thanked Mr Kao for his kindness, saying that as they were making a very early start next morning they would not be able to

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come and say good-bye again, whereat Mr Kao excused himself for not having done more for his guests owing to the shortness of their visit.

The young scholar then made his adieux, and while he was taking charge of a basket of provisions, including wine, rice, fish and meat (and indeed a packet of silver for their boat-hire), that had been made up for them by Mrs Kao, her husband took Yu Ch'en aside and whispered to him that no further proof was needed of Mr Ch'ien's personal attractions or literary attainments and that if Yu Ch'en could bring the arrangements to a final conclusion on his return home, he, Mr Kao, would be supremely happy; to which the go-between replied that he would do his best to do so. Mr Kao then accompanied them to their boat, where they parted.

On his return, however, Mr Kao and his wife talked about the superior attractions of young Mr Yen all night, and neither of them got any sleep at all.

" Betrothal gifts of jade and gold are now superfluous quite,
So anxious are they both to see the scarlet thread (*Vide* Note 50) tied tight ! "

IV

The next morning early Mr Ch'ien and Yu Ch'en set sail in their boat, but the wind was unfavourable and they did not reach home until late at night. Mr Yen was sitting up for them alone by candle-light and was eagerly awaiting their news and the two went in and told him how they had fared on the previous day.

And when he heard that all the arrangements had been practically concluded his joy knew no bounds and he then and there fixed an auspicious day (Note 58) during that very month for sending the betrothal presents. He also handed back to Yu Ch'en the acknowledgment of the debt of twenty taels that he owed him, as an expression of his gratitude.

In due course the second day of the 12th moon was pro-

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posed as the wedding day, and Mr Kao, having found a son-in-law after his own heart and having moreover prepared all his daughter's trousseau in advance, agreed without any hesitation.

And the months and the days fled past, and before they realized it they were in the last days of the 11th moon and the happy day was fast approaching.

Now in those parts the usual practice at a wedding is not to follow the ancient custom, whereby the bridegroom goes to the bride's house to fetch her, but it is usual for the bride, accompanied by her elder brother or father, to go independently to her future home; this is termed "the escorting of the bride." Mr Kao, however, having at length selected a paragon of a son-in-law, had boasted of him left and right and was determined to show him off to as many people as possible. So he prepared a wedding feast on a magnificent scale and invited all his relations and friends to attend, and sent a message to Yu Ch'en to notify him that the bridegroom's presence at the feast was essential. Yu Ch'en was at his wits' end to know what to do about it and went over to see Mr Yen.

"Well, this time it seems that I shall have to go to the bride's house," said the latter.

"But the other day when Mr Ch'ien went," replied Yu Ch'en, stamping with impatience, "the whole household studied his features for an entire day, and they know so well what he looks like that they could draw his portrait from memory! Now, if they are confronted by a person who looks quite different, how shall I, the go-between, be able to explain matters? The whole thing will be broken off short in the middle and I shall get into trouble and lose face very considerably!"

At this Mr Yen became very annoyed with his go-between.

"It is just as I said from the beginning," he cried. "If an affinity exists between us, as I believe, nothing can stop the ceremony! If I had gone on the first occasion there

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would not be all this difficulty to-day. It is you that have got me into this trouble! You always insisted that old Kao was such a difficult person to deal with and would not let me go on that account and compelled Mr Ch'ien to go and represent me. Whereas all the time Mr Kao was perfectly reasonable and has agreed to everything without the least difficulty. I am convinced that this match is pre-ordained and that I am destined by heaven to marry into this family. Do you suppose for a moment that it was merely because they saw my cousin Ch'ien that they agreed with such alacrity? Moreover, they have accepted my betrothal presents and their daughter is already virtually my wife. Do you imagine that they would dare to utter a syllable of unwillingness? You will see; when I go there this time, he will not have a word to say against me, much less will he repudiate the marriage contract!"

"But he has complete power to stop the match," urged Yu Ch'en, shaking his head. "It is no use your getting angry; for if he is unwilling to put his daughter into the sedan chair and send her over, you will be absolutely powerless!"

"Well," said Mr Yen, "it will be only necessary to take a few extra men over with us, and if he agrees, well and good; but if he does not agree we will go in whether or no and take the girl away by force and then let him bring his law suit! I shall have the birth certificate which will be ample proof of the contract which he has tried to repudiate, and I shall be in an unassailable position!"

"I pray you, sir, not to speak so rashly!" returned Yu Ch'en. "A mighty dragon cannot with impunity venture into a den of cockatrices! Although you may take many men with you, you cannot take as many as will be available for the other side. Any such scheme as that will land us in the utmost difficulties. And when the matter is complicated by a law suit, that old man will swear that the man who came to ask for his daughter was not the one who presented himself as the actual bridegroom. Then the official

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will send for the go-between and question him, possibly under the bamboo, and I shall have to speak the truth! Even Mr Ch'ien's future career will be at stake, and it will indeed be no joke!"

"If it is like that," said Mr Yen after a few moments' consideration, "I suppose that I had better make up my mind not to go. But I would be much obliged if you would go over again to-morrow and see Mr Kao once more and tell him that I have already met him once and that in this part of the country the custom of going to fetch the bride is not usually followed. Tell him, therefore, that it would be better to observe the usual practice and to send the bride over without further formality."

"That, I fear, is quite hopeless," answered Yu Ch'en. "Mr Kao thinks so much of his splendid son-in-law and has advertised his good looks and attainments so extensively that all his relations and neighbours are most anxiously waiting for this very occasion, when he goes to fetch the bride, to come in a body and see him for themselves. His presence is therefore absolutely essential!"

"Well, what *can* be done then?" asked Mr Yen in despair.

"In my opinion," replied Yu Ch'en, "there is only one thing to be done, and that is to get your relative, Mr Ch'ien, to go once more. Make up your mind to deceive old Kao right to the very end, even until the bride is safely within your doors. Then you can rely on the fact that you are a man of affluence and can snap your fingers at him, for he will never succeed in getting her back again. When the girl has become your wife there will, of course, be some discussion, but you need not fear that it will go further than talk."

"What you advise," answered Mr Yen with a nod, "certainly seems sound, but this is *my* wedding and it seems that everything must be arranged for the glorification of somebody else! And I shall have the greatest difficulty in getting him to go!"

"But there is no other way out of it," said Yu Ch'en.

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"And although he will indeed be the central figure, it will only be for the time being, whereas you, sir, will benefit for the rest of your life!" And at this reflection Mr Yen's dissatisfaction was mingled with pleasure and he took leave of Yu Ch'en and went over to the library.

"I have yet another commission for you, my worthy cousin," he said to Mr Ch'ien. "On the third day of next moon, my wedding is, as you know, to take place, and arrangements for fetching the bride must be made on the second. And I fear that I shall have to trouble you to go again for me."

"But when I went over to represent you the last time," replied Mr Ch'ien, "it was for a comparatively trifling matter. The fetching of the bride, however, is an important ceremony. How can I possibly take your place on such an occasion? This time, I fear, I must really excuse myself."

"What you say it perfectly true," answered Mr Yen. "But in that it was you whom they saw on the previous occasion, they now know you well by sight; and if suddenly I were to go they would not know what to make of it. Not only would the ceremony not take place, but I fear they might bring a law suit against me which might quite easily involve you also! It is a matter in which we must take every precaution to avoid a calamity. When you have brought home the bride to me, I shall not fear whatever he may say. My plan is but a temporary measure to meet pressing circumstances. For, as you must know, my worthy cousin, the merit that you will acquire by doing this for me will overtop the apex of the most lofty pagoda and you really cannot refuse to do as I ask you."

And Mr Ch'ien, seeing that he spoke with such emotion and entreated him so earnestly, was constrained to give his consent.

Mr Yen then engaged a band of musicians and all the followers necessary for the ceremony of fetching the bride, and gave them all instructions to the effect that no inkling

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of the true situation should leak out, and said that when they returned with the bride they would all be handsomely rewarded, and of course no one thought of disobeying.

When the second day came, Yu Ch'en rose at dawn and went over to Mr Yen's house with the idea of helping to sort out and pack up all the presents and the gifts of money for the servants. And all was eventually prepared, including the clothes for Mr Ch'ien: the scholar's hat, the round collar, the silk girdle and the black boots. All were packed up and arranged in their proper place, and after that the provisions for the boat journey had to be made ready.

There were two large boats, one for the bride to come back on, and one for the go-between and the bridegroom; four medium-sized boats for the followers and servants; and four small boats to form an escort and also in case it were necessary to send any message anywhere. And the ten boats, with the whole party on board, and amid a beating of gongs and a flourish of trumpets, at last set forth upon the broad lake, and the entire journey was enlivened with a never-ceasing discharge of crackers. What a pleasant time it was!

And on the island—

"Welcome the bridegroom as he comes in state!
What joyful celebrations at the gate!"

At last the boats arrived in the evening and were made fast to the shore about half a *li* from Mr Kao's house. Yu Sh'en at once went ashore to announce their arrival, and then all the presents were placed in order and their bearers lined out in procession and the bridegroom's embroidered chair was got ready, hundreds of lanterns and torches were lit, and last of all Mr Ch'ien, in all his wedding robes and seated in his chair, borne by eight bearers and heralded by the sound of flute and drum, arrived at Mr Kao's house.

Now everyone on the island had heard many reports of the wonderful attractions of Mr Kao's future son-in-law, and all the inhabitants had assembled in a great crowd to

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look at him, and there were as many spectators as though it had been a religious procession in the ancient manner. Mr Ch'ien sat upright in his sedan chair like a beautiful statue of jade, and many and loud were the expressions of approval at his appearance. The women in the crowd who had seen the bride, Ch'iu-fang, all declared that they were a very well matched pair and that Mr Kao, having inspected a great many aspirants to the hand of his daughter, had certainly picked out the best-looking of them all.

V

Meanwhile, in the Kao household, a great feast had been prepared and relations and neighbours had all sat closely packed together the whole afternoon, and by now the hall was lit up by the brilliant gleams of countless candles. The guests were sitting listening to the sounds of music when the messengers from the boats came to announce the arrival of the bridegroom at the outer gate. The groomsmen then, with their red scarves thrown over their shoulders and with favours stuck in their hats, hurried to the pavilion outside the gate, where they greeted the bridegroom and read their address of welcome. At their invitation he alighted from his chair and was ushered in with ceremonious politeness and escorted into the hall. There his first act was to pour a libation of wine, and make obeisance before the caged goose (Note 59), whereafter he was introduced to the crowd of relations, one by one. And everyone, seeing how handsome he was, paid him compliments. Tea was then served and everybody partook of cakes and sweetmeats before sitting down to dinner.

And this being a grand occasion, the bridegroom was seated in the place of honour facing south, and nothing else was talked about but his elegant appearance, which was the object of extravangant praise. And it was generally admitted that Mr Kao had really chosen a fine fellow for his

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son-in-law. Mr Ch'ien was secretly very much amused at the whole situation.

"All these people keep staring at me as though I were a spirit," he said to himself, "while I feel as though I were dreaming and that when I wake up it will be nothing after all. Little do they think what a surprise there is in store for them! But, after all, I am only a substitute and the name I bear is an empty one. I wonder when this sort of thing will really be my own experience. My own wedding, I fear, will not be half as fine as this!"

Such thoughts depressed him somewhat, when he reflected on his own poverty, and he ate and drank scarcely anything, so both Mr Kao and his son kept on pressing him to drink in the most polite manner possible. At last, however, he rose to depart, not wishing to delay his cousin's happiness longer than was necessary. Mr Kao persuaded him to remain a little longer and made him have some more to eat and drink, but soon his followers outside had finished their feast and it was about three o'clock in the morning. Hsiao I, moreover, came up behind his chair and urged him to depart, so Mr Ch'ien told him to distribute the money that he had brought as presents for Mr Kao's retainers, and at length began to take his leave.

Mr Kao thought that it was even later than it actually was, and quickly got together his daughter's trousseau and baggage and ordered them to be sent down to the boat. He was just preparing to escort Mr Ch'ien to his chair, when the boatmen came running up to the house to say that a storm was getting up and that the boats could not possibly leave; they must therefore wait till the wind had abated before they could go!

And indeed the wind had begun to rise at about midnight and by this time it was blowing very violently.

"Tall trees are beaten down, the mountains shake,
Vast billows seam the bosom of the lake!"

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But inside the house no one had heard the howling of the wind by reason of the noise made by the musicians; and when Mr Kao told them to stop piping and drumming for a moment or so, that they might listen, they heard the storm making a terrible uproar outside and everyone was amazed at the noise.

Yu Ch'en stamped in his annoyance and Mr Kao was most upset, but the only thing to be done was to invite the bridegroom back into the hall again. However, he sent some men out to see what the storm was really like and to watch for the dawn. And the wind blew harder and harder, while a pall of thick purplish clouds obscured the sky and heavy flakes of snow began to fall.

All got up to look at the heavens and clustered together in a group.

"It does not look as though the wind were going to abate," said one. "A storm that gets up at midnight never stops till the next midnight," said another. "With snow like this," said a third, "they couldn't start, even if there were no wind." "This snowstorm is getting worse and worse," said a fourth. "The wind is so terribly cold," said another. "Even if it were to go down, the lake is likely to freeze over"; but to this another objected, saying that the Great Lake was never known to freeze over to such an extent that boat traffic was stopped altogether, but that a blizzard was what was most to be feared.

And thus they talked, old Mr Kao and Yu Ch'en getting more and more anxious and at a loss to know what to do. So they waited and waited and eventually breakfast was brought in for everybody. But the storm grew more fierce and the snow fell more thickly than ever.

"It will never be possible to cross the lake to-day," they said, "and thus the auspicious day will go by and be wasted! There is no other lucky day in the twelfth moon! Besides, he came here so gaily with his band of musicians and the

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rest of his following, and to send him back alone now would be too bad! Whatever is to be done!"

And there was an old man in the company called Chou Ch'uan, Mr Kao's eldest neighbour, who was commonly looked upon as the arbiter in all the disputes of the country round. And when he saw that Mr Kao was so perplexed he came forward and addressed him.

"In the opinion of this old person," he said, "the present difficulty admits of a very simple solution." And when Mr Kao asked him for his advice, he said:

"It is highly inadvisable to let this auspicious date go past with nothing accomplished. Your son-in-law has come to your house; why not let the marriage ceremony take place here? It will be easy to let the viands that you have prepared here be used as material for the wedding feast and to get ready in this place the decorated candles. And then when the storm does abate they can depart together peaceably. That, I think, would be the best plan!" And this was applauded by all those present.

Mr Kao had already had it in his mind to make the same suggestion and was very glad that it had been put into words by his old friend. So he ordered his servants to prepare the nuptial chamber and the decorated candles.

Now it must not be forgotten that though it was Mr Ch'ien that was the ostensible bridegroom, he was really only a substitute, and whether the wind blew hard or soft it did not really matter to him in the least. When old Mr Chou made his suggestion he was quite overcome with embarrassment, but he never thought for a moment that Mr Kao would consent to such an unusual arrangement and that indeed with eagerness! He was therefore really very frightened, and bitterly lamented the whole business.

He looked round for Yu Ch'en to get him to protest on his behalf, but the go-between was naturally a hard drinker and, partly because it was so cold, partly because he wanted to cover his own embarrassment, had been drinking wine

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so rapidly and eagerly out of a huge goblet, that by this time he was dead drunk and as helpless as a lump of mud and lay stretched out and snoring stertorously on a large chair.

So Mr Ch'ien was forced to speak up for himself.

"This most weighty and important ceremony," he said, "can by no means be undertaken except in strict accord with accepted canons. There is no help for it but to select another auspicious day and I will come again to fetch the bride!"

But Mr Kao would not hear of this. "Our families are already practically one," he said, "why should they be regarded as being separate? Moreover, your honoured father is no longer with you, so you can decide this matter for yourself." And with these words he departed into the inner apartments to make the necessary arrangements for the proposed ceremony.

When he had gone, Mr Ch'ien discussed the proposal with the relations and neighbours present and urged them again and again not to consent to the ceremony being celebrated in the bride's house, but they were not of his mind and all expressed the fullest approval of the proposal, and not one of them offered any word of dissent. Mr Ch'ien was therefore at his wits' end to know what to do, so to gain time he said that he would like to withdraw and ponder over the situation alone. He accordingly went outside and managed to find Hsiao I, with whom he discussed matters. Hsiao I was quite of his opinion that the proposal could be objected to as being irregular and exhorted Mr Ch'ien not to agree to it, but he had no alternative plan to suggest.

"I have refused already, many times," said Mr Ch'ien, "but Mr Kao will not listen to any objection, and if I persist in my refusal it will only make him suspicious. I can only do the best I can in the interests of your master. The importance of this matter cannot be overestimated and I have no intention whatever of not behaving honourably.

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Besides, if I were to deceive him I should justly incur the wrath of both heaven and earth!"

And as they were talking thus the company came out in a body to look for the bridegroom. "A wedding is a most meritorious ceremony," they said to him by way of encouragement. "Your worthy father-in-law has now quite made up his mind, and you, sir, should have no further hesitation!" And poor Mr Ch'ien, who could think of no further reason for refusal, was obliged to obey their invitation to go back into the hall.

The midday meal was then brought in and again the couple were toasted in bumpers of wine. The groomsmen once more donned their scarlet sashes and gave their directions for the celebration of the marriage ceremony, and thus the two, clad in their wedding robes, entered the hall, performed the rites according to custom, and were made man and wife.

"A wedding is a gladsome thing! The nuptial knot is tied;
And man and maid united stand by one another's side.
But in this case, alas! there is no happiness for one,
For what the maid with joy accepts the man would gladly shun!"

VI

And when at evening time the wine was at last finished, the guests departed, and Mr Kao and his wife ushered the bridegroom into the nuptial chamber. The matrons attendant on the bride removed the ornaments from her hair and exhorted the bridegroom to retire, but Mr Ch'ien showed an unaccountable reluctance to do this, so the bride was assisted to retire first and the attendants then left the room. One of the women, as she was shutting the door, again encouraged the bridegroom, but Mr Ch'ien, whose heart was leaping like a fawn in his embarrassment, made no reply but to tell all the women to be off to bed at once. And as they had been

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up all the night before and were actually dozing where they stood, they were glad enough to do so.

Now it was Mr Ch'ien's intention to light a candle and sit up all night, but unfortunately he had taken no precaution to provide a stock of candles and the one in the room was just finished, so when it burned out he did not dare to call for a fresh one, but with his soul full of woe, and without removing a single garment, he threw himself down upon the edge of the bed and lay there without knowing whether the bride's head was turned this way or that.

As soon as it was dawn he rose and left the apartment, and going to his brother-in-law's study performed his toilet for the day. This Mr Kao and his wife attributed to the bashfulness of youth and did not think strange.

And although the snow had stopped falling the wind was still high, and so Mr Kao prepared another congratulatory feast. Mr Ch'ien took advantage of this to become extremely intoxicated and stayed up that night as late as he could, and when at last he retired he found that the bride had preceded him. This time he was so sleepy that he was not able to sit up all night, so as before he lay down fully clad upon the edge of the bed and did not so much as touch the coverlet that lay over the bride. Thus the night passed and next day he found that the wind had subsided. He was, accordingly, all for starting home again, but Mr Kao insisted on his staying until the fourth day before he would agree to his departure, and Mr Ch'ien had perforce to remain.

Again he drank hard all day, and as he sat he managed to tell Yu Ch'en, without anyone else hearing, that he had not removed any of his garments on either of the two previous nights, and though Yu Ch'en expressed the highest encomiums he felt somewhat sceptical as to the strict accuracy of the statement. But nevertheless, under the circumstances, there was, of course, nothing to be done.

Now it must be stated that since the ceremony the bride had managed to catch a fleeting glance now and then at the

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bridegroom, and finding that he was an extremely handsome young man was exceedingly pleased, but was at a loss to account for his lack of affection. She thought that perhaps he was piqued because she had been the first to retire, so she determined on the third night not to do so before the bridegroom. She therefore told her attendants to wait up until Mr Ch'ien came and to request him to retire first. So when he entered the room they attempted to assist him to remove his garments, but to this he refused to submit and, after taking off his hat only, he leaped hurriedly on to the couch and lay, fully clad, as far as possible from its outer edge. This, when the bride came in, she was most displeased to see, so she followed his example and lay all night long in her clothes, nor did she afterwards say anything at all about it to her parents.

The next day broke calm and clear and Mr Kao ordered the boats for the despatch of his daughter to the bridegroom's home; he determined, moreover, to go with his wife to see the bride safely across the lake. So he arranged that his wife should go in the bride's boat, while he himself should share the other boat with Mr Ch'ien and Yu Ch'en. And all the boats were decorated with gaily coloured cloth, and as the sound of drum and pipe enlivened the voyage, it was all very joyous and pleasant.

But Hsiao I, who had had special instructions from his master, and was most nervous as to the reception that should await him on his return, hired a very fast rowing boat on his own account and got off before the rest.

VII

And now it is time to speak of Mr Yen, who, after he had despatched the party to fetch the bride, waited with the utmost expectancy; and at midnight on the second day when he heard the storm get up he became most uneasy in his

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mind. He knew that the boats would be delayed by the wind and the snowstorm, and he feared lest the auspicious day should go by before the bride could be brought home. The decorated candles and the marriage feast were all prepared and waiting, but the night passed and no tidings came, so he became more anxious than ever.

"In so great a storm as this," he thought, "it will be a good thing after all if they have not started. For if they have got caught half-way across the lake, they might very easily be wrecked! And if they have not gone on board at all, my worthy father-in-law will know that we shall have lost the auspicious day; he will never send her across on any ordinary day, but will fix another auspicious day for the event. But how long shall we have to wait for one! This anxiety is enough to kill a man!"

And then later on he thought: "If that Yu Ch'en is anything of a manager, he will certainly have persuaded my father-in-law to send her over in spite of the fact that the auspicious day has passed! In that case I shall not care whether the day is an auspicious one or not, but will celebrate the ceremony at once on her arrival!"

Thus turning the matter over and over in his mind, Mr Yen waited most impatiently and kept going out from time to time to the gate to see if they were coming. And when the fourth day arrived and the wind dropped, he felt certain of getting some tidings at last, and in the early afternoon sure enough Hsiao I appeared to announce that the bride was just coming and was hardly ten *li* behind him.

"But the auspicious day having gone past," exclaimed Mr Yen, "how can they have let the bride start?"

"Well," replied Hsiao I, "they were so disturbed at the prospect of the auspicious day going by that the wedding ceremony was actually celebrated there and then, and Mr Ch'ien acted in the capacity of bridegroom and was married to the young lady three days ago!"

"What?" exclaimed the other. "The marriage celebrated

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three days ago? But you surely don't mean that Mr Ch'ien has already spent three nights in the bridal chamber?"

"That is, sir, actually what happened!" answered Hsiao I. "But the bridegroom lay there all the time without moving a muscle, even as a hungry man contemplates a dainty feast and abstains from opening his mouth!"

"Spawn of a turtle!" shouted Mr Yen, almost beside himself with rage and indignation. "Do you expect me to believe such a tale as that? What did I order you to do? Why did you not tell him to refuse to consent to such a plan? Just see what a mess you have get me into between you!"

"Your slave did indeed suggest to Mr Ch'ien," answered Hsiao I, "that he had better not consent, but Mr Ch'ien said that he would be most careful to study your interests, sir, in every possible way, and declared that even if the mere idea of betraying you should cross his mind, he knew well enough that heaven would be fully aware of it!"

This was too much for Mr Yen!

"Rage from his heart uprose; his one desire
To meet the traitor with a vengeance dire!"

And hurling Hsiao I to one side out of his path, he rushed headlong out of the house, bursting with anger and determined to have Mr Ch'ien's life as soon as he stepped on shore. And as he ran, he saw the boats just coming alongside the bank.

Now Mr Ch'ien, being a most careful person, after taking the precaution of telling Yu Ch'en to detain Mr Kao in the boat as long as he could, leaped on shore as soon as his boat drew alongside. He had nothing whatever to reproach himself with, and being quite proud of his clear conscience he made his way rapidly towards Mr Yen's house. Seeing the latter coming towards him he smiled with pleasure and prepared to greet him ceremoniously and tell him all about what had happened.

But Mr Yen had the heart of a mean man and was in-

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capable of any generous thought concerning the actions of others. On seeing the other coming in the distance, he was incensed at the sight of his supposed enemy, and, his eyes blazing with rage, he gave Mr Ch'ien no opportunity of saying a word, but rushed at him with swinging arms and butting head, grinding his teeth and shouting in his rage: "May heaven strike you dead! A fine time you have been having at my expense!" And before he had finished this fierce ejaculation he knocked Mr Ch'ien's hat off, and began tearing at his hair and clawing at his face, striking out with hands and feet like a mad creature, and shouting all the time. "You vile beast! Another man provides the means at great expense, and you reap all the benefit!"

Mr Ch'ien attempted to deny that he had done anything dishonourable, but Mr Yen was so occupied in trying to do him a mischief that he would not listen to a single word; and his servants did not dare to come out and try to separate them. Mr Ch'ien, however, began to get very angry at being set upon in this manner and shouted for help. The men in the boats then hearing the noise all came on shore to see what was the matter, and to their surprise saw an extremely ugly man assaulting the bridegroom for apparently no reason, so they came forward to try and separate them, but this they were by no means able to do.

Mr Kao asked Mr Yen's servants what it was all about, and they, thinking that it would be no good misrepresenting things any longer, told him the exact truth. If he had not heard the facts of the case he would not have thought the quarrel a matter of much importance, but when he heard what had actually happened, he blazed up in wrath and cursed the go-between for an unprincipled scoundrel to have obtained his daughter by such wholesale lying; and then he fell upon Yu Ch'en and began beating him.

The retainers of the Kao household then thought it was time for them to take a hand and began to assault the ugly man, whereupon Mr Yen's men intervened to protect their

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master, and a fight between the two parties was soon in progress.

Thus Mr Yen and Mr Ch'ien were having one fight, Mr Kao and Yu Ch'en started another, while the two parties of retainers were engaged in a third. The whole population turned out to see the fun and the street became blocked with people and traffic was entirely stopped. It was indeed very like a pitched battle between two opposing armies!

Just at that moment, by great good fortune, who should happen by but His Honour the magistrate of the district, who by chance had been seeing off his superior officer and was returning in his sedan chair by the north gate. He heard the noise and hubbub which uprose to heaven and thought that there was a riot in progress, so he stopped his chair and told his men to arrest the ringleaders.

And when the bystanders saw that the yamen lictors were beginning to make arrests, everybody scattered to the four winds and only the principals were left, Mr Yen, who was still clutching at Mr Ch'ien, and old Mr Kao, who was occupied with Yu Ch'en. Then everyone began to talk at once, so His Honour had them all brought along to his yamen so that he could examine them properly and without confusion.

On arrival in court the magistrate, seeing that Mr Kao was the oldest person present, called upon him to give his version first.

"Your servant is one of the inhabitants of the Tung T'ing islands, sir," he said. "My name is Kao Tsan. I selected a husband for my daughter, a man of fine talent and handsome appearance. To him I gave my daughter in marriage, and on the third day of the present moon the ceremony of fetching the bride was to have taken place. But the departure of the bride was delayed by the recent snowstorm, and I detained the bridegroom in my house, where the actual marriage ceremony was held. To-day the bride was escorted hither, and on our arrival, much to my surprise, we met this

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ugly man who set upon my son-in-law and beat him in the most venomous fashion. And when I inquired the reason for this I was told that the said ugly man had suborned a go-between to come and lie to me and thus obtain my daughter's hand by fraud, sending this youth, Mr Ch'ien, to me to use his name falsely and personate him in my house. Please, sir, but ask the go-between, and then the truth concerning this dastardly outrage will come to light!"

"What is the go-between's name?" asked the magistrate, "and is he here present?"

"His name is Yu Ch'en," replied Mr Kao, "and he is here present before your honour!"

The magistrate then told Mr Kao to stand back and caused Yu Ch'en to be brought before him.

"It appears," said the magistrate to the go-between, "that you have brought about this affair by a false trick and by gross misrepresentation! Your cunning is at the root of the whole matter. You will now confess and tell the true facts if you wish to avoid a condign punishment!"

On hearing this Yu Ch'en was at first inclined to bluster and prevaricate, but the magistrate became very angry and ordered his lictors to bring out the ankle-press in case it should be needed. This alarmed Yu Ch'en, who, although he was a low fellow, had never yet been tortured, so he proceeded to tell the facts of the whole story; how Yen Chün had prevailed upon him to go and propose the marriage on his behalf, how Mr Kao had made difficulties and had insisted on judging for himself as to the appearance and literary qualifications of the bridegroom-to-be, how afterwards Mr Ch'ien had been persuaded to assume Mr Yen's name and personate him on a visit to Mr Kao, and how finally the arrangements had been made for fetching the bride. All this he explained in detail, and the magistrate nodded his head at the end of the recital.

"That sounds to me like an accurate account of what occurred," he remarked. "And so Yen Chün appears to

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have put himself to considerable trouble and expense, while someone else reaped the benefit after all! No wonder that he became annoyed! It seems to me to have been a most deliberate fraud." He then called Yen Chün, who, having heard Yu Ch'en's account and seeing that the magistrate appeared to be in a conciliatory frame of mind, followed the go-between's example and gave evidence in strict accord with his.

The magistrate then called Mr Ch'ien and when he saw that so handsome a young fellow bore such evident traces of the beating that he had received from Yen Chün, he felt very sympathetic toward him.

"You are a *Hsiu-ts'ai*," he said, "and are doubtless familiar with the works of Confucius and Mencius, including the rules of correct behaviour as laid down by Chou Kung! How was it then that you consented to go and fetch this bride as a substitute and identified yourself with such a false plot as this, thus compromising yourself so thoroughly?"

"This matter," replied Mr Ch'ien, "was from its inception by no means of my doing. Yen Chün is my cousin. I am without means. He enabled me to continue my studies and housed and fed me in his own establishment. He implored me over and over again to serve him in this way, and I was compelled to agree to do so. I regarded the plan as an unusual one designed to meet unusual circumstances. And it was thus that I fashioned the rough stone into polished jade for him!"

"Enough!" remarked the magistrate. "You were, it appears, compelled by the ties of blood relationship. But nevertheless you should not have consented actually to go through the marriage ceremony with the lady!"

"It was originally only intended that I should fetch the bride home for him," pleaded Mr Ch'ien. "But that storm got up and lasted three days. The Great Lake was between us and it was impossible for the boats to start back; more-

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over, the set day was passing and Mr Kao was most unwilling to let slip the auspicious moment. It was he who compelled me to consent to the ceremony!"

"But you knew that you were only acting on behalf of another," urged the magistrate, "and you ought to have refused!"

And at this, Mr Yen threw himself forward, and kotowing to the ground cried out: "Oh, most sagacious sir, the fact that he consented to the ceremony is proof enough of his deceitful intention!"

"You are not permitted to address the Court!" said the magistrate, and the lictors closed round Mr Yen and bore him back to his place. The magistrate then turned again to Mr Ch'ien.

"And when you consented to the ceremony," he asked, "you most certainly did entertain the idea of betraying your trust, did you not?"

"Ask Mr Kao, sir," returned the youth, "and he will tell you that again and again I refused. But he was determined that it should be so; and as I knew that if I persisted I should only arouse his suspicions, I consented rather than upset the designs of my relative. And thus the ceremony took place. But though I was compelled to spend three nights in the bridal-chamber, I slept without removing any of my garments, and never once did the thought of offence cross my mind!"

At this the magistrate broke out into hearty laughter.

"From the most ancient times," he said, "there has been only one man, namely, Hui of Liu Hsia, whose self-control was such that he could allow a lady to sit on his knees without experiencing emotion! And of course we have the story of the famous youth of the Lu State, who, knowing that his self-control would not be equal to so severe a test, refused to allow a lady to shelter for the night under his roof during a violent snowstorm! But you young fellows are all notoriously lacking in self-discipline and yet you tell me that you

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spent three nights in the bridal-chamber without one thought of offending! Whom could you deceive with such a tale as that, I should like to know!"

"I speak of that which I know," replied Mr Ch'ien. "And if you, sir, the father and the mother of the people, are unable to believe my account, it will be easy enough for you to tell Mr Kao to consult his daughter in the matter. Then will you learn whether I have spoken the truth or not!"

But the magistrate, who realized that it would be impossible for the young lady to be quite frank if questioned on so delicate a matter, thought at once of a better expedient, and sent a messenger to despatch an aged and reliable nurse to the boat where Mrs Kao and the bride still were, to make discreet inquiries. So the woman went off and soon returned with the statement that Mr Ch'ien's evidence had been no more than the truth.

And when Mr Yen heard this, he cried out: "Then she is my wife! The engagement cannot be broken and I am still willing to take her!"

"You are not permitted to address the Court!" cried the magistrate again. And then turning once more to Mr Kao,

"Are you willing," he asked, "to give your daughter to be the wife of that one?"

"From the first, sir," Mr Kao replied, "*Hsiu-ts'ai* Ch'ien took my fancy. Subsequently it was with him that my daughter celebrated the wedding ceremony. Although Mr Ch'ien did not betray his trust and he and my daughter are as if they had not yet been married, yet they are man and wife in name. And if I were now to give my daughter to Yen Chün, not only would it not accord with my wishes but my daughter also would be unwilling to agree." And the magistrate expressed his entire approval of what Mr Kao had said.

But Mr Ch'ien was by no means willing to consent. "If such a course is taken," he exclaimed, "it will be solely as

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the result of this public inquiry and will not be in agreement with my own desire. If this damsel is given to me, it would be in opposition to the original scheme which for three days and three nights I have kept in mind with the most rigid strictness! Better give the damsel in marriage to someone else altogether! I would by no means lightly consent to step in and cause others to speak slightingly of me!"

"But if the damsel is given in marriage elsewhere," replied the official, "your own conduct in crossing the lake twice as a partaker in that naughty plot will cause an indelible stain on your reputation and you will have to forfeit your degree as *Hsiu-ts'ai!* And therefore I now authorize the ratification of this marriage that has taken place; and thus your previous misconduct will be wiped out! Moreover, your good faith is recognized by all and both father and daughter are willing. What other objection can therefore be raised? Pray oblige me by withdrawing your unwillingness, for my decision is the only equitable one!"

And, so saying, he took pen and wrote out the following ruling:

"Kao Tsan desired to make a fitting match for his daughter in accordance with the usual observance. Yen Chün availed himself of the services of another to personate him, an act which indeed transcends all previous experience.

"A handsome groom was chosen; would it not have been well then to take the sheep and let the ox go by (Note 60), thus giving no heed to what the world might say? Who could then have maintained that the wild deer was a well-trained steed?

"Twice was the water crossed. Faithful was he to his trust!

"Thrice did he enter the nuptial chamber, but he was proud to light the candle after the virtuous fashion of those of olden days.

"The stormy blast was his go-between. The Heavens themselves did work to make them one! A handsome groom espoused the beauteous bride. A well-matched pair were they!

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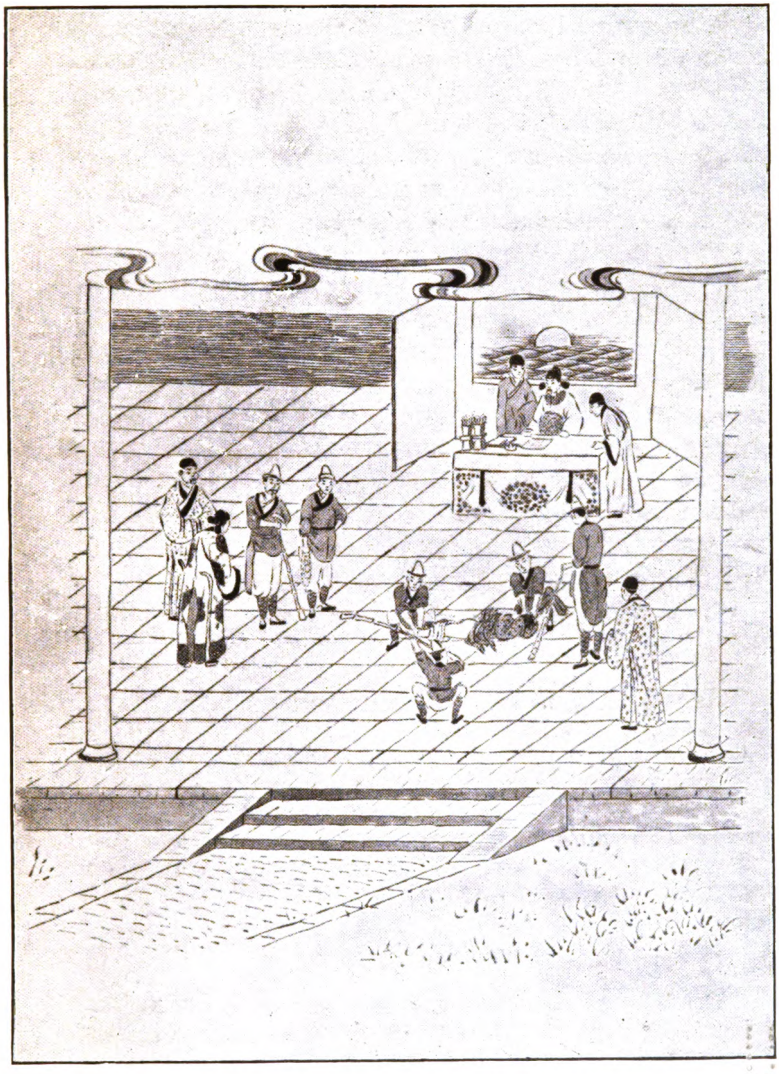

Twenty strokes with the heavy bamboo

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"He who was scheming to obtain the bride failed in his ill-design; thus did a just retribution fall upon him! The damsel of the Kao estate was given to *Hsiu-ts'ai* Ch'ien. No need to celebrate a second rite.

"Yen Chün at first did err in hatching plots, nor should he later on have used his fists! His schemes have failed; thus is his crime condoned. And the expense to which he has been put has helped the *Hsiu-ts'ai's* cause. 'Tis therefore forfeit as a recompense to him whom he assaulted!

"Yu Ch'en in all his doings has been seen to be a false designing knave. He is responsible for the whole affair. A heavy punishment will on him therefore fall; and may it be a warning for the future!"

The magistrate, having written out his decision in these terms, ordered his lictors to seize the unhappy Yu Ch'en, who was given twenty strokes with the heavy bamboo. He was then excused the signing of his confession and was permitted to depart, for the magistrate did not wish to place on record, and thus publish unnecessarily, the fraudulent personation in which Mr Ch'ien was involved.

Mr Kao and Mr Ch'ien then ko-towed their thanks to the magistrate, and the whole party left the yamen.

Yen Chün was so overcome by shame and remorse that though he did not dare to give vent to the anger which he felt, he covered his face, and fled away, like a rat to its hole, nor did he venture out from his gates for many months. And I need hardly tell you that Yu Ch'en was only too glad to go home and attend to the bruises that he had received as the result of his bambooing.

As for Mr Kao, he invited Mr Ch'ien to come back with him to his boat, and expressed his thanks to him warmly.

"Had it not been for your virtuous conduct and ability, my worthy son-in-law," he said, "which excited the admiration of the magistrate, my daughter would, without doubt, have been handed over to that evil-doer. To-day, I beg that you will accompany me and my daughter to my humble abode and stay there for a while, for I have no

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information as to what members of your family are at present residing in your own mansion."

"Both my father and my mother are dead," replied Mr Ch'ien, "and I have no relations at all."

"In that case," said Mr Kao, "you are welcome to come and live under my humble roof, for this old individual will be delighted to provide the means for the continuance of your studies! What do you say?"

"For your kind assistance, my honoured father-in-law," replied Mr Ch'ien, "I am indeed filled with gratitude."

So that night they all set forth from Wu Chiang and next morning early they arrived at the western island of Tung T'ing. The entire population had heard of the strange story, for the news had spread like wildfire. They were fully aware of Mr Ch'ien's steadfast and noble conduct, and there was not one but regarded him with honour. And subsequently he passed his examination and obtained the degree of *Chü-jen*, and he and his wife grew old side by side.

"A beauteous bride is nearly caught by such an ugly man!
But his cousin reaps the benefit of his outrageous plan.
The hideous wretch is forced to stand upon the shore and see
The happy pair flit o'er the waves into infinity!"

NOTES

Note 50.—A marriage in China is not, as with us, left to chance. Everything is arranged by go-betweens, who give due weight to all possible factors that may influence the future of the bride and bridegroom, except the consideration which is the sole deciding factor in Western countries—viz., the personal fancy of the two people chiefly concerned. For in China bride and bridegroom do not see each other until after the knot is finally tied. It is on this fact that the whole point of the present story depends.

In theory matches are made in heaven; so far, the Chinese idea

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corresponds with our own. A mysterious old man called "Yüeh Hsia Lao-jen" (The Old Man of the Moonlight) goes about at the full of the moon and binds together by an invisible red silk cord all those male and female babies who are predestined to be united in wedlock.

But the activities of this amiable old gentleman are not unsupported. The two go-betweens, representing each family, compare the dates of birth of the two intended principals, and if the animals representing the respective hours are not harmonious (*Vide* Note 55 *infra*) the match is declared impossible.

A similar disability attaches to the characters for their surnames. For example, if the character for the man's name contains the ideograph for "wood" and the girl's name includes that for "fire," the match is declared a bad one in that fire obtains the mastery over wood and it is not good for a man to be ruled by his wife.

The match is usually decided upon finally when, all preliminaries having been settled, the two go-betweens exchange cards, on each of which are written the eight characters representing the year, month, day and hour of the birth of the principal. This card, I have referred to in this story as the "birth certificate," for want of a better term.

The bridegroom then sends his betrothal presents, which are regarded as finally clinching the bargain, and there can thereafter be no drawing back without very sufficient reason, such as a serious accident to one of the parties. If there is any repudiation of the bargain, the party withdrawing gives legal cause for damages.

Go-betweens are generally private individuals, relations or friends of the families concerned, but there are professional go-betweens and the profession is a recognized one. The go-between's fee varies with the wealth and position of the principal's family. The actual marriage ceremony, which takes place in the bridegroom's house, is of the simplest description and usually consists in drinking wine from two cups united by a red silk thread—an allusion to the cord tied by The Old Man of the Moonlight.

Note 51.—A man's hair should be perfectly black, glossy and straight and should be kept scrupulously neat.

Note 52.—Divination sticks: Consulting the oracle, as here described, is a formality which is still quite common. A bamboo tube, closed at one end by a piece of parchment, and containing a number of bamboo slips, each one numbered, is handed to the inquirer, who agitates the tube until one of the slips jumps out. If more than one slip jumps out it is "no throw." The number on the slip which falls to the ground is referred to a numbered series of oracular statements (in verse), either written on the temple wall or in a book, and the inquirer gets what comfort he may from the result.

Note 53.—Ch'en Ping and P'an An-jen were two individuals of ancient days famous for their good looks. *Cf.* "Adonis."

Note 54.—Mirrors were not made of glass in China until comparatively recent days, brass, bronze or silver being used.

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Note 55.—The "Hour of the Sheep": about 2 p.m. Each of the twelve divisions of the twenty-four hours of the day has a symbolical animal co-related to it. A similar system applies to the year cycles. (*Vide* Note No. 50, *supra*).

Note 56.—Examinations: In nearly all these stories are found allusions to the former civil service system of China. Officials were appointed only from among the successful candidates at the periodical literary examinations. The degrees that were conferred were three in number—"Hsiu Ts'ai" ("Abundant Talent"), "Chü Jen" ("The Man Raised Up"), and "Chin Shih" ("Advanced Scholar"). In Ming and previous times, even so low a rank as Magistrate was not as a rule granted to any but Chin Shih, though Chü Jen were sometimes appointed.

For the Hsiu Ts'ai degree the examination was in three parts. The first part was held in the magisterial town or Hsien of the competitor, and only those who were successful in this were allowed to compete in the second preliminary examination, which was held in the Prefectural, Fu, City. The third, or final, examination for the degree of Hsiu Ts'ai was conducted by the Hsüeh T'ai or provincial Director of Education. It lasted only one day. Successful candidates were allowed in Ming times to wear a distinctive cap and dress. A Hsiu Ts'ai found guilty of conduct unbecoming a gentleman (Chün-tzu) had to forfeit his degree.

The examination for the second degree (Chü Jen) was held in the provincial capital every three years by an officer specially deputed for the purpose by the Emperor.

The examination for the third degree (Chin Shih) was held in Peking every three years.

The above system has now entirely disappeared, and has been replaced by one theoretically analagous to that with which we are familiar in Western countries.

It should be stated that during the period of mourning for a parent (nominally three years, but in practice generally 27 months) no candidate was allowed to compete in any examination.

Note 57.—Tea at visits: Tea is always brought as soon as a visitor arrives, no matter at what hour. But etiquette demands that it be not drunk until the interview is at an end. A host who wishes to curtail his guest's visit will sometimes express his wishes in a hint by taking a sip at his tea.

Politeness also demands that the tea is not allowed to get cold. It is therefore constantly changed, untasted, during a visit.

Note 58.—As will be apparent in most of these stories, no act of importance is done in China without choosing an auspicious day for the doing. A fortune-teller is generally consulted.

Note 59.—A wild goose is the symbol of conjugal fidelity, for when once its mate has died, the bird is said not to mate again. In practice, since a wild goose is difficult to come by, a tame one takes its place in wedding celebrations.

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Note 60.—The magistrate here avails himself of this occasion to show his erudition by couching his document in the literary style, introducing as many allusions as possible.

The allusion to the sheep and the ox is a reference to a passage in the book of Mencius (I. I. vii): "The king was sitting aloft in the hall, when a man appeared leading an ox past the lower part of it. The king saw him and asked: 'Where is the ox going?' The man replied: 'We are going to consecrate a bell with its blood.' The king said: 'Let it go! I cannot bear its frightened appearance, as if it were an innocent person going to the place of death!' The man answered: 'Shall we, then, omit the consecration of the bell?' The king said: 'How can that be omitted? Change it for a sheep!'" (Legge's translation.)

The allusion to the deer and the horse is a reference to the artifice of the Eunuch Chao Kao, who in the third century B.C. presented a deer to the Emperor, saying that it was a horse. The Emperor in perplexity turned to his courtiers for their opinion, and those who dared to contradict the powerful eunuch were marked down by the latter for destruction. (Giles' Biographical Dict. No. 165.)

"To light the candle": An allusion to the famous Kuan Yü, who when taken prisoner in the second century by the rebel Ts'ao Ts'ao was imprisoned together with the two wives of Kuan Yü's friend, Liu Pei. Kuan stood at the door of the room all night with a lighted candle in his hand, thereby avoiding all scandal. (Giles' Biog. Dict. No. 1009.)

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